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Safetg Sam, the Cycle Sport, Or, HIGH HUSTLING AT SILVER CITY.



A LONE HORSEMAN WAS SEEN WAVING HIS HAT SPEEDING IN THE DIRECTION OF THE TOWN.

Safety Sam, THE CYCLE SPORT;

OR,

High Hustling at Silver City.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,

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STILLWOOD," "THE LAWYER DETEC-
TIVE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPORT ON WHEELS.

"SAM, you can't do it."

"I'm going to make a try for it, anyhow, Hugh."

"But, you'll fail, and maybe lose your life besides. If they had only spared my mare—"

"My steed of steel here will outdo any horse on the plains, Hugh, not even excepting your bonny bay. I'm sorry the mare was killed, nevertheless, for she was a dandy."

The speakers were as unlike as two men well can be.

The first to speak was a bronzed, bearded fellow of forty years, clad in the fatigue dress of a Government scout.

The other was a younger man, maybe thirty years of age, good-looking and with something of the air of a sport about him. He was clad in a bicycle suit of serviceable material and stood leaning upon the handlebar of a fine safety bicycle.

The little town of Freeman, situated upon the level plain and about equidistant from Fort Fenton and Silver City, was all excitement. For many months there had not been the sign of an outlaw or dangerous Indian in that part of the country, but now suddenly a band of outlaws and cut-throat Apaches in about equal numbers had put in their appearance.

When first sighted at Freeman, a lone horseman was seen, waving his hat, speeding in the direction of the town, with a score of others in hot pursuit, and firing as they came. The citizens of the town made ready in a hurry to receive the fugitive and give his pursuers a warm reception if they kept up the chase. The latter were gaining, but finally, seeing the men of the town coming out to the rescue, they swerved and rode off in the direction of Silver City without coming within bullet range.

The fugitive came on, but it could be seen that his horse had been hard hit, and, in a few minutes more, the animal stumbled and fell. The rider landed on his feet, but his staggering was proof that he, too, had been struck.

By this time he had been recognized as Hugh Mackey, better known as "Long-distance Hugh," a scout doing service at Fort Fenton.

The crowd hurried forward to his aid.

He was badly wounded, but not fatally so, and he quickly told his story.

The band had come upon him suddenly and unexpectedly, and had forced him to run for his life, and Freeman being the nearest place, he had headed for there.

His great desire was that word should be carried to the fort with as little delay as possible, but all admitted that it would be a dangerous undertaking, before night, and by that time the outlaws could do mischief much and be miles away.

At that point the Bicycle Sport had come forward and offered his service.

Sam Hoffman was a resident of Silver City, and was now known as "Safety Sam," having been the one to introduce the bicycle into that part of the country.

He was the only owner of a wheel there, as yet, though the country was of the ideal kind for the bicycle—save to the north of Sil-

ver City, where the hills began, and soon merged into mountains.

Sam had been making a tour to the South, and had that morning reached Freeman on his way back to Silver City.

His offer was met with the doubt expressed.

"I don't know, Sammy," the scout still disputed—they were well acquainted. "Seems ter me it would be a question of wind, and I know a hoss kin outrun a man every time. If they git after you the way they was after me—"

"They will get left behind, old man, you can depend on it. You don't understand the bicycle yet. I'll carry the news to the fort for you, and any other information you have for the commander, and I'll cover the distance in quicker time than you could do it with the best horse in the world."

"Well, I s'pose you know what you kin do, Sam."

"I ought to, by this time, Hugh, and I'm right in trim for a race, too."

"Try et if you want to, then, Sam, fer I guess nobody else hyer is dyin' to undertake the job."

Which was true; no one was anxious to take up the scout's work and carry to the fort the information concerning the outlaws. All recognized the fact that there was danger in the undertaking.

It was thought that the fellows had come with the intention of stealing some horses, but it was probable that they intended a good deal worse than that. Perhaps the new mining-camp of Gold Lode, to the north of Silver City, was their objective point.

A boom was in the ascendancy at Gold Lode.

Safety Sam had been about ready to continue on his way to Silver City when the excitement arose.

His wheel was one of the finest, light but extra strong, and it was fitted with a pair of special pneumatic tires. On it he carried a rifle, and a sort of semi-military knapsack was swung within the diamond. A couple of revolvers in holsters at his hips completed his armament, and he looked like a bad snag to run up against.

He now prepared to mount.

"And that's all the news I'm to carry?" he made inquiry.

"That's all," answered the scout. "You kin tell General Fielding to 'venge the death of the best hoss I ever straddled."

"To say nothing about the bullet you got yourself. Yes, I'll do that, never fear. But, now I'm off. With good traveling nearly all the way, I ought to make more than horse speed."

He stepped lightly from the ground to the saddle and started.

The crowd broke out in a cheer as they watched him spin away rapidly, and Safety Sam took off his cap and waved it in response.

CHAPTER II.

FORT FENTON.—SAM'S ARRIVAL.

FORT FENTON lay dull and frowning under the slanting rays of the late afternoon sun.

There was nothing to be seen, far as the eye could reach, save the level and almost barren plain, excepting only the course of the river, which ran to the north-west.

The river was marked by a long thread of trees and undergrowth that stretched away like a great, green serpent across the brown, sunburnt wastes, and through which, here and there, glimpses of the river could be caught, like flashes from the face of a mirror.

On the top of the house occupied by the commander of the fort were a man and a woman.

The housetop was flat with a parapet on every side, and served the purpose of a point

of lookout. In fact, it was a favorite resort of the commander's for an hour or so after the heat of the day.

General Fielding was the man mentioned as being there on this occasion. The woman with him was a short, fleshy lady, with silvered hair, perhaps eight or ten years younger than the commander. She was a widow, visiting at the fort as chaperon to some younger ladies.

"And you have no misgivings as to their safety, general?" we find her asking.

"None whatever, Mrs. Masters," the hearty, strong-featured commander of the post answered. "There have been no dangerous characters around here in a long time."

"I am so glad to hear you say that," the plump widow gushed. "I should never forgive myself, general, if anything should happen to the dear girls. But, then, had there been danger, you would never have allowed your daughter to go."

"Correct, Mrs. Masters. Had I known of any danger, or even suspected such, I would not have allowed Fanny to leave the fort. They will return, all in good season, never fear. They are in safe hands, with Lieutenant McKenzie and Shandy Graff. Of course, they would not leave Silver City until toward evening."

"And it is a long distance."

"As I told you this morning. But, let us be seated; there is no use our looking for their appearance for a couple of hours yet."

The commander had his field glass in hand, and he raised it to his eyes to take a parting sweep of the horizon as he finished the remark, while Mrs. Masters sat down.

Suddenly the general gave a start and fixed his attention upon a certain spot in the distance.

The woman noticed his manner, and with commingled interest and alarm demanded:

"What is it, General Fielding?"

"Just what I'm trying to make out," was the response.

"Is it they?"

The widow was precise in her grammar, when she tried to be, which was all the time—unless, perchance, she was excited.

"No, no; I told you they could not be looked for for a couple of hours yet. Besides, this thing is coming from the direction of Freeman— Hal now I make it out; it must be that fellow, Safety Sam."

"What a name!"

"Hal hal Well, yes, it is rather odd, at first hearing. But, something is up, for he is coming like the very dev— Your pardon, Mrs. Masters; but, really, he is coming like the very wind."

"It is evident that you draw a distinction between the two terms, general," the woman remarked, in a would-be clever manner. "But, no matter; I am growing used to the wild ways of your wild country out here, and such slight departures are becoming less shocking."

She was watching the commander's face while she was speaking, looking up at him in a smiling way which, in a younger person, might have been suspected as an attempt at flirtation.

And as she looked she noticed that his face suddenly paled and that the lines around his mouth grew hard, and she sprung to her feet in alarm.

"General, what is it?" she asked, grasping his arm.

"Apaches, by thunder!"

The words were spoken in a voice akin to thunder, too, and there was now no apology for the profanity.

"Indians?" the woman gasped.

"Nothing less, and the worst on the face of the earth."

"Gracious heavens! What will become of your daughter and mine, and of May Harvey? to say nothing—"

"What is going to become of that man

who is trying to escape, is what we had better ask just now," the commander interrupted, in a brusque manner, and he ran to the opposite parapet.

"Hol orderly?"

He had to call a second time before he was answered.

"Tell Captain Dettlinger to get out his company as quick as God will let him, and dash to the rescue of that fellow coming from Freeman!"

The orderly saluted and was away on a run instantly, while General Fielding turned and put his glass to his eyes to take another look at the fugitive wheelman, Mrs. Masters, meanwhile wringing her hands in excitement and dismay.

"Will he escape, general?" the woman ventured to inquire.

It was a moment before General Fielding made answer, and the answer appeared upon his face before it left his lips.

The lines around his mouth relaxed slightly, an expression of relief came over his face, and when he lowered his field-glass he had only to put into words what he had already told silently.

"He'll escape, if nothing breaks," he said. "He is coming like the wind, and so are the red-skins, but he has got it all his own way if he holds out. The only thing I fear is that they will not follow him far enough for us to get a crack at them."

"I can see them now."

"Here, take the glass and look!"

He gave his field-glass into her hand and turned to shout some directions to Captain Howard Dettlinger, who just then came dashing up from the barracks.

When Mrs. Masters had focused the glass to her own sight, she was thrilled by what she saw when she leveled it at the moving objects so far away that they could just be made out with the naked eye.

Distance was annihilated in the moment.

There was the bicycle-rider bending over at his task as he made the wheels spin, and behind him came six or eight Indians at full speed.

Puffs of smoke were seen, too, from the weapons of the Indians, and it seemed strange to Mrs. Masters that she heard no report, but when she removed the glass from her eyes it was no mystery.

The vision receded as if it had been only a picture fastened to a strong rubber of which she had just let go the end.

General Fielding rejoined her, while Captain Dettlinger hurried back again to the barracks, and, a few moments later, the boys in blue dashed out upon the plain with a ringing cheer, and were away to the rescue.

The commander of the fort took the glass again, but as soon as he got it adjusted to his sight he uttered an imprecation. The Indians had given up the pursuit, and were running away with as much speed in another direction, as if aware of their danger.

CHAPTER III.

FORWARD TO THE RESCUE.

"DAST them!" was the commander's expression, "they have given up the chase; but our boys will not give them up so easily; they can bet their feathers on that!"

"Then they are going away, general?" asked Mrs. Masters, venturing to lay her plump fingers upon the commander's sleeve.

"Yes; proof that they know the fort is here, which is also proof that they are no strangers."

"And the dear girls will be safe, do you think?"

"Perfectly so, Mrs. Masters. Our boys will attend to the red-skins. But, let us go down and welcome that daring bicycle-rider. I must hear his story of the race he has been running."

The plump little woman ran girlishly for-

ward to the opening in the roof, and the commander took her hand to assist her down the rather steep stairs to the floor below, but she clung to his hand even further than that, perhaps unthinkingly—it had that appearance.

By the time they reached the outer fence of the fort grounds the bicyclist was drawing near, and they had not a great while to wait for him to come up and dismount.

His face was flushed and he was perspiring freely, but with respect to his nerve he was as unconcerned as if out for an afternoon spin.

He saluted as soon as he touched the ground, and General Fielding demanded:

"Safety Sam, what are you doing here?"

"I am playing the role of Government scout, at present, general," was the cheery response.

"And you came near to sharing the fate of some Government scouts I have heard of, too," rejoined the commander. "You are lucky that you are wearing your scalp, I should say."

The Cycle Sport smiled.

"They had me on the hustle at first, general, I admit, when their horses were fresher, but toward the last I was only playing with them to lure them on, for I wanted to give you a chance at them. I was in no danger."

"Barring accidents."

"Of course."

"Well, where are you from? But, first, let me introduce you."

Safety Sam was duly presented to the plump widow, after which he told what had happened to Long-distance Hugh, and what had taken place since his own departure from Freeman.

"And you say there are more of them?" the commander of the fort mused.

"Yes, there must have been a score in the band at first, as I said, but not more than seven or eight of them were after me. They were no doubt told off to intercept any one who might attempt to carry the news of their presence from Freeman to the fort, and as I was that one they took after me like racers."

"And you out-distanced them on that thing."

"Exactly."

"But, which way did the main body of the rascals go? You have not told me that."

"They went in the direction of Silver City, or more properly, in the direction of Junction."

"Whew!"

General Fielding's face grew set and stern in an instant, as he thought of the danger to his child and her companions.

"Mercy!" cried the widow. "The dear girls are in danger after all! Oh! what is going to be done, General Fielding?" And she caught hold of his arm in her new excitement.

"What girls?" the Cycle Sport demanded.

"Why, my daughter and her visitors," explained the commander. "They rode over to Silver City this morning—"

"Not alone!"

"No; there were four men in the party—five, with Shandy Graff as handy man for the day; but, what can they do if they are attacked by a dozen outlaws and Indians?"

"Merciful goodness!" gasped Mrs. Masters, clutching his arm still more tightly. "Can't you send soldiers to meet them, general?"

"That is what I must do, immediately," declared the commander, and he turned abruptly to call to one of his men.

Of course the whole fort was out, the departure of Dettlinger and his men, and the news of Indians, having created great interest.

"Twenty troopers, quick as possible, and my horse," the commander ordered. "We

must start out on the trail to Silver City immediately. Mrs. Masters, I must take leave of you."

"But, you will be careful, general?" she asked feelingly, looking up into his face.

"We'll be careful to give the red devils what they deserve, when we fall in with them, if that is what you mean," was the rough but kindly response.

"I mean careful of yourself."

"Don't trouble your head about me, Mrs. Masters. I'm all right. I'll have one of the men accompany you to the house—"

"Not at all, general, for it is only a step away. But, do not fail to bring the dear girls safely home, and be very sure to take good care—"

But, the commander had lifted his hat to her and was already hastening to meet the man who was bringing his horse.

As he went he looked to speak again to Safety Sam, but the Cycle Sport was not to be seen.

"Where is that fellow?" the commander cried, stopping.

"What fellow, general?" asked a soldier, saluting.

"Sam Hoffman, or Safety Sam."

"Why, he's gone; there he goes!"

The man pointed, and the commander of the fort saw the cyclist in the distance, spinning away in the direction of Silver City.

He had mounted, unnoticed by the general, had crossed the bridge that spanned the river just there, and was "pedaling" rapidly in the direction named, to the rescue of one he loved—Fanny Fielding, the commander's daughter!

Sam Hoffman had first seen her at Silver City, and her beauty and peerless grace in the saddle captivated him immediately.

Since that he had visited the fort several times, and on one occasion had escorted her for a ride to try a new horse. He loved her, but there was an obstacle in the way; the young lady was engaged.

Lieutenant William McKenzie was the happy man, and the Cycle Sport knew well enough that the lieutenant was one of the party who had gone to Silver City.

But, that mattered not; Safety Sam was not the man to hold back where his help was needed, the more especially in this instance where love was the added incentive.

"If she needs my help she shall have it," he added to himself, "even to the risking of my life to restore her to the arms of my rival!"

With that resolve, he bent to his task and spun along silently in the direction of the "Junction."

The trail from Freeman and that from Fort Fenton, to Silver City, came together about ten miles to the southwest of Silver City, and were one trail from that point onward.

This place had been named Junction, and here a trooper met the daily stage to Silver City and received such papers and letters as were directed to Fort Fenton, at the same time delivering any letters that had been sent from the fort.

Sam knew the whole country well, for he had been doing considerable traveling since he had had his wheel.

He was an expert rider, and with muscles like steel wire he had yet to experience his first tire-out. His machine was one of the very best and he was proud of it.

Soon he had left the fort out of sight, and was in the vast solitude of the almost desert.

Nothing was to be heard, save the slight noise made by the pedals and the constant hiss of the broad tires as they swept over the ground, and no living thing was in sight anywhere.

Half an hour later the sport caught sight of a horseman coming from the opposite direction, riding like a madman, and Sam increased his speed to meet this rider the more quickly. As they drew near to each other,

Safety Sam recognized Shandy Graff, the trooper, his face pale and wearing a look of horror, while his horse was dripping with sweat and almost winded.

CHAPTER IV.

RIVALS IN LOVE.

SHANDY GRAFF was a Scotchman, and a thoroughly good fellow.

He was one of the best-natured men in the world, and the victim of almost every practical joke the officers at the fort indulged in. Safety Sam knew him well.

The Cycle Sport dropped from his wheel, and the trooper drew rein when he came up.

"What's the matter, Shandy?" Sam demanded.

"My God, Maister Hoffman, I am carrying the worst news to General Fielding!"

"Then you have encountered the outlaws and Indians?"

"Yes, yes. One man is dead, poor Charlie Weaver, and Lieutenant McKenzie is badly hurt. And that is not the worst of it—"

"Tell me at once."

"The ladies—they have been taken prisoners, with the other men, and I was the only one to get away. But, I can't stop; I must run my horse till he drops, and my own legs must do the rest—"

"Hold on, Shandy! General Fielding knows about the accursed cut-throats, and he is coming this way now, with his men. No need for you to go any further. Fanny Fielding—she was not hurt?"

"No; but, they have got her—"

"Where was the attack made?"

"Half way between here and Junction."

"Then it was not long ago."

"Less than an hour."

"And which way did the miscreants go?"

"To the east, bearing toward the hills. There was a dozen of 'em, at the least."

"Yes, I know. Well, you may as well stay right here and rub your horse and wait for the commander, for he will soon be here. Tell him Safety Sam is on the trail, and tell him to push along."

"Be 'sure' I will, Maister Hoffman."

The sport sprung again to the saddle of his wheel, and went spinning along at a rapid rate.

"It is worse than I imagined," he said to himself. "I hoped they would not meet the desperadoes, though I knew if they did it would be the beginning of trouble."

"And Fanny Fielding—let them harm one hair of her head, and I'll hunt them to the death, every dog of them, if it takes me a year! She must be rescued—yes, at any risk. And I'll do it, or I'll lay down my life in the effort. Safety Sam, your work is before you."

Spite of the miles he had already covered, he bent to his task and made his wheel carry him forward like the fleetest horse, and, in due time, came to the scene of the attack.

On the ground lay the body of Charles Weaver, one of the most popular young officers of Fort Fenton.

Not far away, under the edge of a clump of stunted mesquite, supporting himself upon his elbow while he looked to learn what was coming—for his ears were quick and he had caught the sound of the bicycle, was Lieutenant McKenzie.

"Safety Sam!" he exclaimed.

"McKenzie!"

"Yes, curse my luck! You met Shandy?"

"I did, and General Fielding is coming with some of the troopers. I must spin right on, while there is daylight left."

The sun had been down for some minutes now, and the first shadows of night were beginning to hover over the plain.

"Sam, you will do me a favor?"

"If it is one that I can do in a minute or two; the minutes are precious."

"You do not understand; it is nothing you can do here. Promise me that you will rescue Fanny Fielding, if you—"

"I have already registered the vow that I will lay down my life in the effort, if need be," the Cycle Sport interrupted.

The face of the lieutenant paled.

"Then you are still my rival?" he interrogated. "You will risk your life because you love her?"

"I will not deny that I love her, McKenzie; but, that aside, I would attempt her rescue anyhow, or the rescue of any other woman in similar distress. Where are you hurt?"

"My leg is broken, but I am hurt worse in the heart, just now. Well, it is your chance, Sam, and God speed you! Rescue her, at any risk, even if it is to rob me of her love. But, in mercy kill her rather than leave her in the hands of Grat Benson this night."

"Grat Benson, the deserter, your sworn and bitter enemy!"

"Yes, yes; the same. He is the leader of the band. I knew him in spite of his disguise."

"And I have heard that he swore he would rob you of Fanny Fielding, even if he had to resort to desperate means to do it. Then he was forbade to speak to her, and he deserted."

"And he is just the fellow to keep his word. He is bad, clear through and through, Sam, and has got these cut-throats together and has come here for the one purpose of carrying out his diabolical threats. My God! it maddens me to think of it! Save her, Sam, even if it be to make her your wife!"

"I'll save her, or give my life to the effort," was the grim response.

"Hearken: They went to the east, bearing toward the hills, but the last I could see of them from here they were separating as if they intended to scatter in every direction—"

"Good heavens! If that is the case she is lost!"

"No, no; hear me out: She is in the hands of Benson himself, and he rides a big brown. That is the track of his horse, just there. Examine it well. You can pick out the same track where they separated, and that will set you right. If you are successful, you will at least owe this much to me."

"I'll not forget it, lieutenant. You said something about his disguise."

"He is rigged out for an Indian. Some other fellow is, or was, pretending to be at the head of the band."

"Fanny was on her horse?"

"Yes, and tied to the saddle when they started from here."

"Good enough. Now we are beginning to get the matter in shape, McKenzie, and I only regret that you can't go with me."

"Rivals as we are, eh?"

"Rivals as we are. We are not foes, thank God, even if love has strained our friendship."

Safety Sam was standing with his foot on the step, and with his hands on the handles of the handle-bar, ready for the start.

"Anything I can do for you?" he paused to ask.

"Nothing, Sam. Never mind me, but hurry on to rescue her. Take care not to let them get a chance at you, or she is lost."

"I'll try to."

With that, the Cycle Sport sprung to the seat and went rolling away.

William McKenzie looked after him, and for a few moments his lips moved silently as if in prayer.

"It is a daring risk," he then said to himself aloud, "but who would not take it, for her? If he is successful, he ought to have first claim upon her, but—"

He did not finish it in words.

Meantime Safety Sam was pressing steadily forward on the trail, at good speed and without a sign of tiring.

The ground was not bad for his purpose,

being almost barren. It was one of those places where, in ages past, the sea must have washed, and which the ages present are only beginning to reclaim from the desert.

The trail was broad and easy to follow.

But, night was now coming on, and every passing minute made it more and more difficult.

Before it was quite dark, the lone cycle scout came to the place where the band of cut-throats had dispersed, and without the clue he possessed he would, perhaps, have been utterly helpless.

But, would he be so? Let us see.

Dismounting, he first of all lighted the lamp with which his bicycle was furnished, and by its light he scanned the ground.

It was easy to pick out the tracks of the big brown horse, and presently he struck the trail where it and one other horse had gone off together. A few steps further along, and he picked up one of Fanny Fielding's gauntleted riding-gloves!

CHAPTER V.

THE SPORT'S CLOSE SHAVE.

"HA!" he exclaimed, as he caught it up and pressed it to his lips, "this is a grand discovery. The trail would have been mine anyhow, for certainly I would have searched well for some guiding clue."

Still, he would not deny that the information he had received from McKenzie had led him to the finding of the glove, and that it would be the means of saving time which otherwise he must have lost. It was a satisfaction, though, to feel that he could have done without it.

Alone and unobserved, he pressed the glove fondly, then put it in his pocket.

Walking a little way, to make sure that he was not mistaken about the tracks, he finally put the lamp in its place and mounted the wheel.

"The light will be a telltale," he mused; "but, no matter. I can't do without it, and if I find I am discovered it will take but a moment to put it out and run a new course."

He found now that he had to go at a slower gait than before.

He had to keep to the trail by the light, and to be sure of it had to be constantly alert.

Still, his speed was not slow, by any means. The ground was smooth enough for safe riding, and, at the same time, the tracks were clear cut and distinct.

He pressed on, and still on, with all the silence possible.

Presently he came to a sudden stop and dismounted.

There were here some droppings along the trail, and he touched one of these with his finger.

It was still warm with animal heat, and this discovery told him that at last he was close upon his foes, and that it would be necessary for him to observe all possible caution.

"They can't be far away," he said to himself. "Another little spurt, and I'll have to dispense with the light, I suppose."

He remounted, and, guiding the machine with one hand, held the lamp with the other in such a way that it lighted up the ground just ahead and yet could not be seen a great distance off, save in one direction.

Some minutes of this, and he again stopped; he thought he caught the sound of horses not a very great distance away.

Turning low the light he slipped the lamp into his pocket, and mounting, he took a spin forward through the darkness, at a rapid pace.

Soon he halted once more.

There was no mistaking the sound now; horses were only a little distance ahead, going at an easy lope. A little further, and he must have run down upon them, to be, perhaps, discovered.

Making sure that the guns in his hip holsters were ready for instant use, he again rode forward, until through the darkness, he caught sight of the dark forms of horses and riders ahead.

Out came one of his revolvers, and he cocked it.

"I could do it easily," he said to himself, "but there is the possibility of a mistake, and I cannot afford to take the risk of that. No, I must wait, and let it be by strategy."

Advancing yet a little nearer he held that distance, and thus they went forward, shadowed and shadowed.

Safety Sam was almost as silent as a shadow, going at slow and steady speed, while those ahead made no sound save by the hoof-strokes of their animals.

Sam, still grasping his revolver, had about decided to rush in and bring the matter to a conclusion at once, when the horses came to a stop.

Now he slipped from the saddle, laid the wheel on the ground and ran forward.

"We'll stop here and take a rest, my dear," he heard the man saying.

He had dismounted, and was leading his horse a little distance apart to a spot where some bushes marked what might possibly be a spring.

"And will you not free my hands now?" the voice of Fanny Fielding asked, in pleading accent. "These cords are almost cutting my flesh, and I cannot help myself in any way whatever."

"I'll attend to that, soon as I see whether you are armed or not. Just wait till I secure my horse."

At the same moment the young lady heard a hiss of caution at her side, and a hand was laid on her arm.

"Be silent for your life!" whispered the sport. "I am Safety Sam! I'll save you or we'll die here together, Miss Fielding!"

Even while speaking, he had cut the lariat that bound her to the horse. Then she was lifted from the saddle, but in that moment they were discovered.

Having secured his horse, the outlaw turned to his prisoner; but seeing the saddle empty he sprang forward with an angry exclamation.

Sam gave a pull upon Fanny Fielding's arm, a signal for her to drop to the ground, and which she understood instantly, while he turned and leveled his revolver over the saddle.

"Stop!" he cried. "Up with your hands, or I'll drop you!"

The outlaw stopped short, but it was only to jerk a weapon from his belt and fire, the bullet barely missing Sam's head.

The Cycle Sport did not wait for another shot, but fired instantly, and the fellow dropped to the ground like a log, without even uttering so much as a groan or cry.

"That settles him, I guess," said Sam.

"And I am only too glad, for he well deserved it," declared the undaunted Fanny.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes; it is that miserable scoundrel, Grat Benson, whom papa had to threaten to shoot, at one time, and who afterward deserted."

"Then McKenzie was right. But, come; let me free your hands, and if you are ready I will assist you to mount again and will conduct you to the fort, or to join your father, as you prefer."

"My father! Where is he?"

"He is out in pursuit of these devils. I will tell you all about it as we go along."

"Yes, for we must hasten to the rescue of the others. Oh! it was horrible, Mr. Hoffman! But, how came you here? Where is your horse? And, how can I thank you for this great service?"

"All of which I will tell you as we go. Are you ready? My horse is my bicycle, and it is lying on the ground a little way from here."

"I might have known that Safety Sam

would ride nothing else. Yes, I am all ready."

He helped her to the saddle, and that done, took the bicycle lamp from his pocket and turned up the light.

"I'll just take a look at that fellow, and see if I fixed him for good or not," he remarked, stepping around in the direction of where the man had dropped.

To his great surprise the fellow was not there!

At that moment the thud of hoofs was heard, accompanied with a laugh, and a shot was fired in their direction.

"Ha! ha! ha! It is Safety Sam, is it? Well, I'll show you how safe you are now, my dandy sport. It won't take me long to lodge a bullet in you, and then I'll have my prisoner."

He fired again, and the sport returned the compliment.

"We are not out of the woods yet, Miss Fielding," he said, quickly. "Come, this way, and I'll get my wheel and be off with you. Who would have thought he was tricking me? I don't see how I missed him. No matter; we are two to one, now, and he knows it."

Sam ran in the direction of the place where he had left his wheel, found it quickly and leaped to the seat.

"Now, then, a race for life, I suppose," said he. "If you only had a wheel, too, Miss Fielding, we could lose him in ten minutes, for he would not be able to hear us. Now we're off!"

CHAPTER VI.

SAFETY SAM SCORES.

AND off they were.

The young lady's horse was anything but fresh, but it was yet good for a considerable race.

Barely had they set forward when they heard the big brown thundering after them, and it was plain that they were seen. The brown, too, seemed to be the faster of the horses.

"Ha! ha! ha!" came the taunting laugh. "It seems we have changed places, Sam Hoffman! Before, I had the girl and you wanted her, and now you have got her and I want her. Let's see if I can't drop you out of the race, and then I'll have it all my own way."

And, forthwith, the whistle of a bullet was heard, simultaneously, almost, with the report of a revolver.

"What shall we do?" asked the young lady in alarm.

"I'll have to stop and kill him, if he is going to keep that up," was the cool reply.

"But, you might get killed yourself, Mr. Hoffman, and then I should be at the mercy of the heartless monster."

"Didn't fetch ye that time, hey?" sung out the pursuer. "Well, here's for it again, and better luck this time, meebby. I'm bound to have ye!"

Another shot, and the bullet sped unpleasantly near.

Both had gone to the right of the Cycle Sport, proof that the outlaw was taking care not to hit the young woman.

Fanny was riding close to his left, and they were speeding along side by side, the sport regulating his speed to suit that of the horse the young lady was riding.

Sam now gripped the handle-bar firmly with one hand, and with the other he drew one of the revolvers from its holster at his hip and fired a couple of shots at the pursuer, firing over his shoulder and without aim, of course. And another laugh was the result.

"I'll have to stop and tackle him," the Cycle Sport decided.

"But, think of what I said; you might get killed yourself, and then—"

"I have been thinking of what you said, Miss Fielding. Your concern was for yourself—"

"No, no, Sam; you wrong me, indeed you do! I spoke thoughtlessly when I said what I did. If you stop, I will stop with you; you shall not risk your life alone."

Another shot, and this time decidedly close.

Sam wheeled to the right, sharply, stopped, and leaped to the ground.

The moment he was upon his feet his guns began to talk, and the pursuer turned to the left to get out of range.

Fanny Fielding had turned in the same direction, as it happened, with the object of placing the outlaw at a disadvantage, between her own weapon and those of her rescuer.

Sam was upon his wheel again in a moment, and started after the ruffian, but, even as he started, he heard a scream from the young lady.

The rascal had fired a shot at her horse, at close range, and the bullet had done its work only too well!

The animal was rearing, as Sam could see in the darkness, from his position, and the next moment it fell heavily to the ground, while, with a laugh, the outlaw dashed away.

Sam was to the spot in a moment, and he asked anxiously:

"Are you hurt, Miss Fielding?"

"No, Sam," was the glad response. "I jumped clear when my poor pet fell. I fear we are lost now, for he can circle around us and shoot us down before we can hit him moving."

"We still have the bicycle," asserted the sport. "It can carry us both; it must. He wants you alive, and will not dare fire again for fear of hitting you. Come, I will show you how you must place yourself and hang on. It won't be comfortable, for you will have to stand on one foot."

"No matter; I can do it, Sam. And, we are not so safe as you think, for, if he finds he cannot possess me, he will endeavor to kill me as well as you."

"You think so?"

"He has declared that he will do it."

"That's bad; but he'll try to get possession of you before he has resort to that measure."

The Cycle Sport had, while speaking, righted his bicycle, and now he said:

"You see this step. Well, I will mount and start slowly, and as soon as I do so you put your foot here, taking hold of my coat, and pull yourself up, and then take hold upon my shoulders."

"I understand, Sam."

"Your right foot will have to hang idle, and you will have to do the best you can with your skirt, but it is dark and we are under press of stern necessity. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Sam mounted and started slowly, and the young lady made the effort to carry out the instruction he had given her.

At first she was not successful, but, after an attempt or two she held fast, and in a moment announced that she was all right, whereupon the sport increased the speed of the wheel and they were away.

It had been quite an effort for him to steady the machine while the young woman got on, but now it was plain sailing.

But, they had not escaped their foe.

After dashing off a little distance, and finding he was not pursued, the outlaw had turned and circled back again, and came up just in time to witness the start.

It can be understood that he was really at a disadvantage, and he knew it, for they were two to one against him, as Sam had said.

"Ha! ha!" the fellow laughed. "Goin' to try it that way, are you?"

For his answer, Fanny let go with one

hand and fired a shot in his direction to let him know there was danger.

Sam was bending to his task with a will, and every moment the wheel was running faster and faster. As its speed increased his work became the lighter, naturally; but, after them thundered the big horse, and handicapped as he was, Safety Sam could get up but half speed, nor could he turn quickly enough to baffle the pursuer, as he might readily have done if alone. He felt that he could avoid being overtaken, however, barring accident.

"Are you all right?" he inquired of the young lady.

"Yes, I am all right; don't think about me, Sam."

"Well, keep firing, and hit the horse if you can, but take care not to fall. When you have emptied your own gun, reach down and draw mine from their holsters."

"All right; I'll stop him, if I can, Sam. But, isn't this a novelty, though! Were it not for the horror of what has taken place, I believe I should really enjoy it. Here's another at you, Gratt Benson!"

She fired again, but, as before, without effect.

A shout of derision was the response, and a shot was fired in return, but so wide of the mark that it was plain the fellow had not intended it should hit.

They were not close together, one party being just visible to the other in the darkness, and the young woman admitted that if she should hit the horse it would be more by chance than through skill.

"Suppose I slow up suddenly and let him come nearer," suggested Sam.

"I am not afraid to take the risk if you are not, Sam," was the response.

"There is little risk about it, in my opinion. He does not want to hurt you, Miss Fielding."

"But, if I should hit his horse he would then open in deadly earnest, I can imagine."

"That is true; I will not put you to greater danger than you are now in. You must live for your father and McKenzie."

The young woman fired a shot at that moment, and made no rejoinder to the remark, as if she had not heard it.

And that shot, unexpectedly, took effect! "Ha! I've done it!" Fanny joyously exclaimed. "Hurrah! The horse is down, Sam!"

It was even so. The bullet had struck home, and, with a plunge, the horse had started to fall, had caught itself, but only to drop the next moment.

A howl of rage was heard, followed by a string of oaths. Immediately several shots were fired in quick succession, the bullets whistling unpleasantly near but fortunately doing no harm.

The Cycle Sport bent steadily to his task, increasing the speed if anything.

Presently he made a turn to the right and laid his course toward the point from which he had started, the place where the band of outlaws had dispersed for the purpose of baffling the pursuers.

CHAPTER VII.

ORDER OUT OF CHAOS.

It was a gay and merry party that had set out from Fort Fenton that morning for Silver City.

Fanny Fielding had not spent all her life with her father at the fort, as hardly needs stating, but had been for quite a number of years away at school.

She had been out of school about a year, at the time of our story, and had since been living at the post, which, of course, was her only home, her mother having been some years dead.

With her father's permission she had invited some friends to pay her a visit at the fort—two of her school-day chums, May

Harvery and Kate Masters, and Mrs. Masters, the mother of the latter, had come along as chaperon to the party; for, to make it interesting, a young man was one of the number.

This young man, Alexander Longman by name—although he was anything but a long man in fact, was paying his attentions to Miss Masters. He was decidedly a short man, but it was understood that he had a long pocketbook, and his stature was one of no account in the eyes of Mrs. Masters, in comparison with that more essential qualification.

The little excursion to Silver City, then, had been arranged by Fanny Fielding for the entertainment of her guests.

The party had consisted of Fanny and her affianced, Lieutenant McKenzie; May Harvery, Lieutenant Weaver, Kate Masters and her lover, Longman; Mary Kincaid, daughter of Commander Fielding's housekeeper—who was the widow of an officer, and Henry McLoyd, a young officer who was paying attention to her. Then they had the trooper, Shandy Graff, as we have seen.

Setting out early, they had reached Silver City in good time, and the day being a fine one, had pressed on to Gold Lode, the new mining-camp some miles beyond Silver City, where a "boom" was in progress.

There they had taken dinner, setting out upon their return at a seasonable hour—or in time to reach home before dusk.

Everything had gone off nicely, and it had been a joyous day.

Some time after passing Junction, on the way home, just as they came to a place where some mesquite bushes grew at one side of the trail, they were sprung upon by the outlaws and Indians.

The horses were frightened and the women terrified by the yells of the cut-throat band and the firing of pistols, but the young officers, with their revolvers, opened fire upon the rascals. They were outnumbered, however, and we have been told the result.

The only man to escape was Shandy Graff.

Lieutenant Charley Weaver was killed, Lieutenant McKenzie wounded in the leg, and the others were taken prisoners.

The prisoners, then, were Fanny Fielding, May Harvery, Kate Masters and Mary Kincaid, together with Sergeant McLoyd and Alexander Longman.

Longman was the most terrified of all. Had it not been for the horror of their situation, and of what had taken place, the others must have been amused, for the little fellow almost cried, and some of his appeals to the "higher and nobler feelings" of the outlaws and Indians were ridiculous.

At the place where the band dispersed he broke down completely.

He was taken off alone by one of the Indians and about as evil-faced a cut-throat white as the band could show, and he screamed aloud for the others to save him, as if they were not in the same dilemma.

The amusing part of it was, though none saw amusement in it at the time, that all day long he had been posing as a hero, and had been telling of the heroic exploits he had heroically exploited—so to put it—in times past, making up, as it were, for his lack in stature, by his boldness of spirit.

All six prisoners were separated and each was taken in a different direction, although the general trend was toward the hills.

The object was plain.

Night was at hand, and the rascals thought by this means to baffle pursuit, as before explained.

Meantime General Fielding had hastily ordered up a detachment and taken the trail, making all haste for the Junction, and he was not a great while behind the Cycle Sport.

When he came to where Shandy Graff was awaiting him, Shandy's horse was so much

rested that the trooper mounted and rode along, telling his story as they dashed forward, and General Fielding's face took on a hard, stony look that boded ill for the ruffians, one and all.

Coming to where the attack had been made, it was nearly night, and by the time the commander heard what McKenzie had to say it was becoming difficult to follow the trail.

It was, however, impossible to think of giving it up; the prisoners must be rescued.

Leaving enough men to assist McKenzie, and to carry the body of Weaver to the fort, the commander pressed onward, himself and an expert trailer running ahead on foot in order that no mistake might occur.

By dint of patience and careful work they made good time withal to the spot where the outlaws had dispersed, and there the commander gave vent to his exasperation in language stronger than we care to quote.

"What is to be done, general?" asked Lieutenant Russel.

"We have got to follow every trail, if we have to do it on our hands and knees!" was the sharp direction.

"We'll do it," said the lieutenant, simply.

"That we will!" cried a trooper.

"And the guid Lord help them when we get them!" spoke Shandy Graff.

"Well, here are no less than six trails," said the commander, "and he have about five or six men for each one."

"Yes, sir."

"Detail the men quickly, Russel, and start them; I will take four with me and follow on after Sam Hoffman."

"Yes, sir."

With all haste the order was carried out, and slowly, carefully, the work of trailing the cut-throat band was carried on.

"Halt! who comes there?"

"Oh! papa! it is you?"

With a glad cry Fanny Fielding left Safety Sam and ran forward and threw herself upon her father's breast.

She and Sam had dismounted from the bicycle and were walking for a change and for a little rest, for both had begun to find such riding tiresome.

The young lady, having to stand on one foot, and the sport, with a double load to carry—it was, in fact, the second time they had made such a change since we last saw them.

Sam came quickly forward, and the general grasped his hand.

"God bless you, Sam!" he exclaimed. "You have saved the life of my child, and I'll not forget the service."

"Thank you, general," responded Hoffman. "But, the work is not done yet; there are the others to rescue, and we must make all haste about it, I should say."

"You are right; come, get up here, Fanny, and we will not stop here a minute. You can tell me your story as we go along."

"And, papa, the leader of the outlaws is Benson."

"Yes, curse him, so McKenzie said. Let me get hold of him, and he will die by the rope. Shooting is too good for him!"

Briefly the story of the rescue was told, Sam Hoffman allowing Fanny to relate it in her own way. That done, the young lady told her father what she knew of the plans of the outlaws.

By daylight they were to meet again in the hills, at a point called Devil's Basin. They believed they could not be followed by night, and with such a start they had the idea that they could escape so far into the hills as to make rescue impossible, and then they would force a ransom.

That was to say, all but Benson were to rendezvous at that place. The deserter intended to carry his prisoner south into Mexico and there make her his wife, and

could he have succeeded she might never have been heard of again.

But, the Cycle Sport had thwarted that diabolical scheme.

Knowing now the place of rendezvous, and being unable to aid further in the trailing of the other outlaws and their prisoners, General Fielding and Safety Sam agreed that the best thing to be done was to make their way to Devil's Basin as quickly as possible, there to await the turn of events.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TROOPERS STRIKE.

DEVIL'S BASIN was a wild hole in the hills, about midway between Silver City and Gold Lode, but further to the east.

It was off the main trail, and was only reached by a tortuous way which led up from the plains some miles to the northeast of Junction.

The place was seldom visited, so the trail that led to it was not generally known.

Even General Fielding himself was not certain of the way, but fortunately he had with him a man who knew it well.

That man was one of the troopers, while Safety Sam, who had once visited the spot, believed that he could find it again.

The trooper was made guide for the occasion.

They pressed forward at good speed, and Safety Sam found the running of his wheel but play, after the experience he had had of carrying a double load.

Silence prevailed, for the most part, and nothing was to be heard but the steady thud of the hoofs upon the soil.

Miss Fielding's mind was full of anxiety for the safety of her friends, and knowing what her own escape had been, her heart was heavy with fear for them.

In about one hour they reached the hills.

The trooper who was acting as guide had made no mistake, and they came to the desired spot without trouble.

Here they drew rein.

Just as they did so, and as the commander was about to speak, the thud of other hoofs was heard, and the commander hurriedly whispered:

"Some one is coming this way! Draw aside, quickly, on either side, and we'll have them in a trap, if they are a part of the outlaw band. There are not more than three or four of them, I take it."

They listened.

The others agreed with the general in his opinion.

By the sound, it was guessed that there were three of the party, and they were coming at an easy canter.

"Yes, draw aside," Safety Sam seconded. "I'll stand here and hold them up, and at the same time I'll flash my bicycle lamp upon them and you can see just what you've got."

"A good plan," agreed the general. "Not a sound, now, but every man ready for business when the time comes."

Silently yet quickly they took up their positions, and waited.

The Cycle Sport had laid his wheel away at one side, and he stood ready in the center of the pass.

It was so dark, there under the edge of the hills, that it was impossible to see anything more than a few yards away, which, in this case, made it good for the soldiers.

On came the horsemen, and the Cycle Sport waited until they were actually upon him before he brought them to a stop.

His object was to make the surprise complete, and to have them well in the trap so that they could not possibly help themselves or get away.

Suddenly the light of the bicycle lamp was flashed full upon them, and the command rung out:

"Halt! Throw up your hands!"

No mistake had been made, as the light instantly revealed.

The horses were brought to a stop with a suddenness that almost unseated one of the riders.

The other two uttered oaths and imprecations under their breath, but they obeyed the second part of the command with as much haste as the first.

One was an Apache, looking as nearly like a devil as one's imagination can depict, the other was a villainous looking white, while the third was a prisoner, a man of limited stature.

They were, in fact, Alexander Longman and his captors.

Before any move could be made, or they could have time to think what to do, General Fielding and his men were upon them.

"You dogs!" the general cried, in his anger. "It would serve you right to drop you out of your saddles with bullets in your brains, here and now!"

"General Fielding!" exclaimed the prisoner, whose face was the picture of fright and distress. "Thank God, you have come to my rescue! Save me, I beg of you! Save me from these fiends!"

"You are saved, Mr. Longman," spoke up Fanny.

"You, Miss Fielding! Thank Heaven you have been rescued!"

"Bind these fellows, hands and feet, and gag them well," the general ordered at the same time.

An order that the troopers proceeded to carry out straightway.

And while they were doing that, the general and Safety Sam cut the thongs that confined Mr. Longman, and he was freed.

"Thank God! thank God!" the poor fellow fervently ejaculated. "I thought I was done for; that I had come out here into this wild land only to die miserably at the stake."

"Two rescued, anyhow, and a couple of prisoners," observed the commander.

"And how did they rescue you, Miss Fielding?" the short Longman inquired. "I feared that you had been killed."

"I owe it all to this gentleman with the light, Mr. Hoffman. But, no time now for explanations, the others must be rescued, and I only hope they have fared no worse than we."

"Yes, yes; that is true, that is true."

The man spoke as if he hardly knew what he was saying.

"We must save Miss Masters, at any rate, you know," Fanny added.

She could not resist the temptation to remind the lover of his lady fair.

"True, true, true," he chattered. "I am almost bewildered, and know not what to do."

"And you have such a golden opportunity to prove yourself a hero in her eyes, too," the young lady added. "I hope it will come around so that you can rescue her all by yourself."

"Yes, yes; to be sure, to be sure."

But, it was not believed that the lover was anxious to be placed in any such critical position.

"Are they bound?" asked the commander.

"Yes, sir."

"Forward then, for Devil's Basin. Lead the way, Rogers."

"And here is the lamp, if you want to use it," said Safety Sam, offering the article as he spoke.

It was not safe for the Cycle Sport to ride his wheel here, so he fell in behind the others and walked, pushing the wheel by hand as bicyclists generally do under like conditions.

In about an hour they rode into the pocket, or basin, of the name we have quoted.

They had previously examined the ground, by means of the light, and were assured that none of the outlaws had preceded them.

The first arrivals had been captured, others would naturally think, provided they took the pains to examine the ground, that all the tracks had been made by their comrades.

Two men were directed to make a fire on the side opposite to the entrance, and the commander, Safety Sam, and the others, took up their positions near the entrance, to be ready to secure the others as they might come in.

The plan was carried out, and was successful to the full.

The cut-throats came in by twos and threes, and they fell into the trap so easily that they were prisoners before they knew it.

And then, after a time, the soldiers began to steal into the basin, finding their way by having followed the trails upon which they had started, and at last all were there.

This, however, was not until far into the night, and it was decided to remain there and start for the fort by daylight.

The prisoners had all been rescued, and they were unharmed, further than being badly frightened and completely tired out, but by morning they were none the worse for that.

They started as soon as it was light enough to see their way, the troopers with the prisoners under guard, and in due time reached their destination, where startling news awaited the commander. It had been a night of tragedy.

CHAPTER IX.

STARTLING QUESTION.

DURING the night a murder had been committed at the fort.

The victim was Captain Deerforth, one of the best-liked men of the garrison, who had been sick for some weeks.

He was a single man, a fine fellow, and his room was on the ground floor in one of the officers' quarters. His nurse had stepped in about daylight, to see how he was, and was horrified at what he beheld.

The captain was dead, and a knife was buried in his breast.

A window on the opposite side of the room was open, showing plainly how the assassin could have, and undoubtedly had, entered to do his hellish deed.

The body was nearly cold at that time, showing that a considerable while had elapsed since the blow had been struck. On the shutter-pin on the window-sill was discovered a bit of blue cloth.

This much was discovered by the nurse before the alarm was given.

As soon as the discovery was made known, the whole fort was in a state of excitement immediately.

Taken together with the events of the evening, and the uncertainty that existed with regard to the missing young ladies, it was all that was needed to cap the climax.

The fort was in an uproar.

Hasty search was made, with the hope of getting a further clue, but none was to be had.

There were tracks under the window, where a man had evidently leaped out, but that was the last that could be seen of them, for the ground was of such a nature that they could not be followed.

The sentinels all averred that no one had passed their lines during the night, and as it had been a night of danger, their word was taken for that.

The last persons to come in had been Captain Dettlinger and his men.

They had been successful in running down the Indians who had made it so lively for Safety Sam on the previous afternoon, and had killed or captured the whole number of them.

It was ten o'clock when these came in, and as soon as the prisoners had been put in the guard-house the captain and his men retired for the night, and nothing further was done around the fort till midnight, when the

guard was changed. At that hour a dim light was seen burning, as usual, in the room occupied by Captain Deerforth.

The next was the terrible announcement.

No further discovery had been made by the time General Fielding and the rest came in, as mentioned.

"What!" exclaimed the general. "Deerforth murdered?"

"Yes," answered Dettlinger. And he gave the circumstances as they were known to him, about as we have set them forth.

"And there is no clue?" the commander demanded.

"Not the least."

"Deerforth was an enemy of yours, I believe."

"We had trouble, as you are aware, but that was settled between us only yesterday."

"Well, no matter. This mystery must be cleared up. But, I take it that it is no mystery. I believe it was that fellow Benson who did the deed. He was the head of these outlaws yesterday, curse them!"

"Grat Benson?"

"The same."

"But, how could he get in here?"

"He could do it, if any man could, knowing the fort as he does."

"No doubt you are right, general, but I would stake my life, almost, that no man could pass our sentry line of a night."

"If it has been done, we must learn where and how, and that point will have to be made stronger. But, that is only a guess. If no one came in, then who did kill poor Deerforth?"

"That's the mystery."

"And one that must be cleared up."

"You are right. This fort must have nothing of the kind unsolved."

"Safety Sam, what do you think about it?"

"Useless to ask me, general," was the answer. "You know I was out with you all night."

"Yes, and I know that you are something of a detective, too. I have not forgotten your work on that robbery case at Silver City last winter."

"You give me credit for more than I deserve."

"Not a bit. I want you to take hold of this matter for me."

"Well, I'll do that, gladly enough, but you must not depend altogether on me for the solving of the riddle."

"You are the only man capable of doing it. If it was Grat Benson, put it on him, and if not, then we want the guilty wretch, whoever he may be."

"Very well."

It was a sad day at Fort Fenton, needless to say.

After the horror and excitement of the night, and this fresh horror of the morning, the ladies were overcome.

They entered the house at once, and nothing more was seen of them for a considerable time.

Not so with the commander and the others. As soon as they had partaken of a cup of coffee, they began at once to investigate into the mystery—that is to say, the commander, Safety Sam, and the officers of the fort.

For the time being the prisoners were put in the guard-house, and their hearing was postponed till this more important matter could be disposed of.

The man who had been acting as nurse to the murdered captain was first called to tell his story.

He was a young man, who had been for some time one of the surgeon's assistants.

He stated that he had last seen the captain alive something after midnight, when called and asked for a drink.

The nurse slept on a cot in the hall, just outside the door, and thought himself a light sleeper. However, he had heard no noise, but slept from that time till daylight.

Safety Sam questioned the man closely, but if he learned anything, none of the rest were able to do so from anything that was said.

Finally Sam took a different turn.

"Captain Dettlinger," he remarked, "I heard you say that you had not been on friendly relations with this man."

"And you also heard me say that our difference was settled yesterday," was the response, in a cool and straightforward manner.

"You had no ill-will against Captain Deerforth, then?"

"Not the least. We had a perfect understanding, and parted friends."

That was all the Cycle Sport asked him, and he made the announcement that he was done for the time being.

The rest of his investigation, he said, he would carry on quietly, and promised that he would report to the commander within the hour.

General Fielding understood his desire to be alone, and bade the others accompany him, and ordered that the prisoners should be brought forth for their hearing in the mean time.

Some of the fellows had been recognized as old offenders.

One, who was nominally the leader, was eager to lighten his sentence by confessing everything.

The commander ordered him to confess, but without any promise on his part that such confession would in the least save him, and the fellow told his story.

They had been gotten together by Benson, he declared, and had come down into that section to do some mischief that would bring the soldiers of the fort far out after them, so that Benson could carry off Miss Fielding.

Such had been the original plan.

When they accidentally met the party coming from Silver City, however, then the ringleader suddenly changed his plan and ordered the attack.

Their hearing did not occupy an hour, and they were dealt with according to the law as it applied to their offense—martial law, of course, and that is of the most short and summary character.

When the commander went finally to his house he found Safety Sam there.

"Well?" he asked, briefly.

He was not the suave gentleman of the day before, but the stern old war dog, his blood fully heated.

"Would you consider Dettlinger capable of having killed Deerforth?" Safety Sam asked, without the least excitement and with face perfectly motionless.

"Heavens! no!" the commander cried.

"What are you talking about, Sam Hoffman? Have you any reason to believe that Dettlinger did do the deed? I'd as soon believe you guilty of the crime yourself. Explain."

CHAPTER X.

WAS HE GUILTY OR NOT?

"I HAVE no desire to think him guilty, sir," said the Cycle Sport. "But, I have come upon certain facts that must be explained away."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, there has been some trouble between the two men. Next, there was a bit of blue cloth found on the window sill, and there were tracks under the window."

"Yes, yes; but, explain."

"And the knife with which the deed was done, too; that has been shown to have been at one time the property of Dettlinger. The piece of blue cloth was torn from his fatigue coat, and the tracks under the window are certainly his. There is no guesswork about this."

The commander's face was the picture of amazement.

"Can it be possible?" he mused. "You are certain there can be no mistake?"

"I made sure of that before I came here, General Fielding. I wish you would send for Dettlinger and have him explain."

"I will do so, forthwith."

"When he enters," said Safety Sam, "put him under arrest at once, and see how he will take it, or what he will say."

"Then you really think him guilty?"

"I believe him innocent, sir."

"In spite of the evidence you have discovered?"

"Spite of everything, sir."

They had not long to wait for the appearance of the captain, who, when he entered, saluted in the usual manner.

"You sent for me, general?"

General Fielding's face was stern and hard as rock.

"I sent for you, Captain Dettlinger," he said. "I arrest you for the murder of Captain Deerforth."

The accused man took a step backward, his face blanching, and he looked from one man to the other, in utter bewilderment.

"What have you to say?" the commander asked.

"I have only this to say, sir," was the answer. "I am innocent of the deed, as innocent as are you, sir."

"How, then, was it that a knife of yours was used? How came your tracks under the window? How came a piece of the cloth of your fatigue coat on the hook on the sill?"

"Impossible!"

"The facts," said the Cycle Sport. "Can you explain away the evidence?"

"Safety Sam, you do not believe me guilty of this crime, I hope. General, are you in earnest?"

"I have just told General Fielding that I believe you innocent," answered the sport detective. "Your action under arrest has confirmed that belief. Still, you must explain."

"And I was not in earnest about the arrest," said General Fielding. "It was to test you."

"Thank God you believe in me, sir. All this has come to me like a revelation."

"Why did you not recognize the knife as yours?"

"I do not admit that it was mine, sir. I did not recognize it, certainly. But, I have not examined it closely."

"Please do so, then," said Sam, taking it from his pocket and extending it to the captain.

Dettlinger took the weapon, and after one close look, said:

"It certainly was mine. It is a weapon I had in my room, but I have not seen it before in a long time."

"So I have learned," said Sam.

"But, the tracks?" queried the general.

"Another strange thing, sir," said the captain. "Queer it did not come to me before, but it did not. The tracks are mine, made by the old boots I had on yesterday."

The commander's face began to cloud, and he looked unhappy.

"This begins to look serious, Dettlinger," he said. "What occasion had you to jump from that window?"

"I was in the room with poor Deerforth yesterday afternoon, sir, when the alarm was sounded, and I leaped from the window on the rear side of the building, in order to respond the more quickly."

"Ah! that explains it, then."

"And, now that I am reminded of it, I remember that my coat caught on the shutter catch as I leaped out. Were poor Deerforth alive, he would bear witness to what I say. I thought no more about it till this moment, being reminded of it. The excitement blotted it from my mind."

"It is strange you did not remember the

knife, and that you did not recognize your own tracks, and stranger that you did not recall leaping from the window, captain."

"I admit it all; but I have spoken the truth."

"Well, sir, you may go, now, but hold yourself in readiness to report to me at any moment I may send for you."

The captain bowed, saluted, and was gone. "What do you think, Safety Sam?" demanded the general, sternly.

"I think he is innocent, sir."

"That is what I want to think, too, Hoffman; but does it stand to reason, the story he tells?"

"Does it stand to reason, either, general, that he would use a knife of his own? or that he would leap from the window and leave his tracks there to be seen?"

"That is so; but, how the deuce could he forget so soon?"

"In no way, except as he tries to explain—that the excitement removed it from his memory."

"Well, it is hard to think of him as guilty of such a deed, Sam, and I want the matter cleared up. What is your opinion of it?"

"My belief is that Grat Benson is the man we want."

"But, we cannot prove that he was in the fort last night. In fact, it was next to impossible to get in."

"I don't know about that. I think I could worm my way through the line on almost any night, and certainly he ought to have been able to do so, knowing the whole ground so well."

"But, why should he want to kill Deerforth?"

"He mistook him for another."

"Ha!"

"Dettlinger used to occupy that room, did he not?"

"Yes, yes, so he did; and he once was the means of having Benson brought up for trial."

"Which, for such a man, was reason enough to make him desire to have Dettlinger's life. So, in spite of appearances, I believe Dettlinger is innocent of the crime."

"Oh! he certainly must be. No sane man could think him otherwise, and yet I declare it chilled my blood when those three points were brought up against him. You must make sure of Benson."

"Another thing I was going to say: scouts should be sent in every direction to intercept him."

"Right. I'll do it at once."

"I'll set out for Silver City, and maybe to Gold Lode. I think the latter place will be the one likely to attract him."

Their interview was continued to some length, and just when Safety Sam was about leaving the house a note was brought in and handed to General Fielding.

The commander opened it at once, and it read as follows:

"GENERAL FIELDING:—

"The fact that you arrested me satisfies me that you do not entirely think me innocent of that crime. I am going to hunt down the man whom I believe guilty. I cannot remain here under suspicion. Do not imagine that I have deserted; I shall return as soon as I have accomplished my mission."

"DETLINGER."

"Confound it! the worst thing he could have done!" cried the commander, passionately.

"Suppose he had asked leave of absence, would you have granted it?" asked the Cycle Sport.

"Certainly I would, for the purpose he here explains."

"Yet he evidently did not think so. Believing that you thought him guilty, he had reason to think that such a request would be

refused. You will see him back again in good time."

"Well, I hope so; I depend on you, Safety Sam, to straighten out the tangle."

And so the matter rested, at that time.

Dettlinger was certainly gone, and the manner of his going was a mystery. No one had seen him take his departure, his horse was not gone, and he had left no trail by which he could be followed.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INCIDENT AT GOLD LODE.

In fact, there was a double mystery at Fort Fenton.

Not only the murder mystery, but the strange disappearance of the man who had been partly suspected of the crime.

To be sure, there was his letter stating his intention, but the mysterious manner of his leaving the fort made it look, if looked at in that light, that he had really deserted.

Search and inquire as they would, no light could be thrown upon the mystery, and so it rested.

Later on, the Cycle Sport took leave of the commander and others and set out upon his wheel for Silver City, where he arrived in due time and where he took first of all some needed rest.

Meantime there was the double funeral at the fort, and the bodies of Captain Deerforth and Lieutenant Weaver were laid to rest with military honor and all due solemnity. It was a sad day, and the whole garrison wore an air of sorrow that was sincere.

But, to change the scene.

The late stage coming into Gold Lode, by way of Freeman and Silver City, had its usual complement of passengers.

And that was, for the time and the place, as many persons as it could possibly carry, for the new "diggings" was at the height of its "boom," and people were pouring in every day.

The inside of the stage was full, while the outside carried all who could possibly find room to hang on.

With four horses across the plains, two more had been put on at Silver City in order to get the load up into the hills to the new camp.

Gold Lode needs no description. It was a Deadwood, or a Creede, but on a smaller scale, and it had the usual variety of buildings of every sort, size and kind.

Perhaps chief among these was the Top Notch Hotel.

It was the chief place in its line the camp afforded, and it was here that the stage stopped.

Among other passengers to get down was a man who wore a black beard and carried a heavy cane, and who was clad in rough but serviceable clothes of the ordinary type.

In fact, there was nothing about him to draw attention, unless it was the cane he carried.

A cane was not a usual sight in such a place.

He had the air of a man who was used to the world, and who was able to take care of himself.

Entering the hotel, he made inquiry for lodging, and finding that he could be accommodated, registered his name and paid for some days in advance.

The name he set down was—

HOWARD BURKSON.

He seemed to be a very reserved man, and while most of the other new arrivals were quick to tell more or less about themselves and their reason for coming to Gold Lode, this man said nothing.

He took supper with the others, and after that strolled around the town, merely idling his time, apparently.

Finally, however, in front of the Saddle

Saloon, he came face to face with a man for whom he had evidently been looking, for immediately they exchanged a glance of recognition.

The one was standing in the doorway of the saloon, and he immediately turned and walked into the place.

Howard Burkson followed him.

They took seats at one of the tables there provided, and fell at once into a conversation.

"Well, what success?" asked Burkson.

"Good enough," was the answer.

"You got the papers?"

"Yes, here they are. Pay the money and you get them."

"You are willing to let me examine them, of course, to make sure there is no mistake?"

"I s'pose so."

The papers were handed over, and the man of the black beard and cane opened the small packet.

"This is all right," he said immediately, and put them in his pocket. "I will hand you the money, and the matter is all settled."

He took a sum of money from his pocket and passed it over to his companion, who took it eagerly and put it out of sight, and they rose from the table.

Their business together had been brief and to the point.

There had been nothing about it to draw attention, either, and yet two men had been close observers.

One of these now stepped suddenly forward, thrust a revolver in the face of the man of the black beard, and ordered him to sit down, speaking in low tone.

At the same time the other put a gun behind the ear of the man who had been paid the money, and he sunk down upon his chair, pale as death, rolling his eyes up to see who had him.

"You will hand over those papers to me, sir," spoke the one who had captured him of the black beard.

"Who are you?" was demanded.

"No matter to you who I am, I have the right to demand them."

"And I claim the right to refuse. Remove that gun, or I shall call for help from the crowd."

"The worse for you, if you do that."

"Why?"

"Try it, and see. Come, the papers!"

Of a sudden the man of the black beard brought the end of his cane upward, and it caught the revolver, hurling it out of his captor's hand.

The revolver was discharged, but the bullet was buried harmlessly in the wall, while the weapon landed with a clatter some distance away, and the heavy black cane moving again, the man was knocked senseless to the floor. Again, and the other captor was disarmed.

It had taken place so suddenly, too, that no one could move to interfere.

"Come, get out of here!"

So the man with the cane exclaimed, and his companion was with him immediately and they made a break for the door.

"Stop those fellows!" cried he who had been last disarmed. "A hundred dollars for either of them! Stop them! for they are wanted, and we are detectives on their track!"

But, too late, for the crowd had stood still to hear these words, and by the time they awoke to action the two men had bounded out into the night and were gone, and those who ran out the next moment could not find a sign of them.

The street was light, in both directions, but the men were not to be seen.

The crowd poured out, weapons in hand, ready for business, but the two men had disappeared utterly.

He of the two self-styled detectives who had not been hurt, was out of the room with

the first of the crowd, and his disappointment was great.

"Too bad!" he cried, "when we thought we had them, sure. Hunt for them, men of Gold Lode, and a hundred dollars to the man who captures one of them! They can't be far off yet!"

A good many of the crowd made haste to search, but it proved to be a search that was fruitless.

They returned to the Saddle Saloon.

There the man who had been struck to the floor was coming to, and his companion was bathing his head.

Many had by this time asked what the trouble was about, but it was not until this man could speak that anything was revealed of the mystery.

"That fellow with the beard is one we have been following for weeks," he explained. "He is wanted for murder and robbery, and all we wanted was to catch him in the act of making a deal for certain papers."

"We had the clue that he was coming this way, and it was believed that another murder was his object. Not only so, but to come into a fortune which these two deaths would leave open for him. But, his game has been nipped in the bud, it appears."

"But, he still has the papers," one hearer reminded.

"True; but now he dare not use them, for we know how they came in his possession. And, if the plan to murder his cousin has not been carried out yet, it will now be useless for him to perform that part of his nefarious scheme. First the uncle, then the cousin, and Hanson Burk would be a rich man—if he could have it all his own way."

CHAPTER XII.

MEN OF MYSTERY WELL MET.

THIS was merely an incident by the way for such a town as Gold Lode.

Where all was excitement every day in the week, where fights were frequent and the crack of the pistol often heard, such an incident hardly passed beyond the saloon in which it had taken place.

That there was something back of the affair, however, went without saying, and perhaps there was more than the detectives had stated.

The two men, however, had made good their escape, it seemed, and the detectives' work had come to naught.

The detectives went to the hotel.

There a man asked for an interview with the leader, or chief, of the pair.

"I'd like to talk about that affair of the saloon," he said.

"Well," asked the leading detective, shortly, "what have you to say or to ask about it?"

"You spoke about a murder that might possibly be done."

"Yes."

"Who is the person that may be killed?"

"First, who the deuce are you?"

"A detective, just as you claim to be."

"You?"

"I am talking about no one else, sir."

"Did you not come on the stage with us?"

"I did."

"What are you trying to detect?"

"You have not answered my question yet, sir."

"See here, are you what you claim to be, my man? If so, we have no objection to talking with you, for maybe you can be of use to us."

"I have not come to you for that purpose, but to see if you cannot be of use to me. But, we'll never get on at this rate. Answer my question, and I'll answer the one you have asked."

"Well, the man in danger is one Captain Deerforth, of Fort Fenton. But, no doubt

he will not be bothered now, seeing that the scheme has been upset and the mask torn off. Now, what say you?"

"In answer to what you asked?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I am trying to hunt down the man who murdered Captain Deerforth at Fort Fenton—"

"Heavens! then the deed has been done?"

"Yes, he was murdered last night, and an innocent man has been accused of the deed. It is your duty to go to the fort, see the commander, and set the matter right."

"It was our intention to go to the fort the first thing in the morning. If we had secured our prisoners, we would have taken them with us."

"You must go anyhow. But, these papers, are they important?"

"They are highly important."

"To whom?"

"To the man who holds them, if he would dare to present them and could escape the suspicion of having killed his cousin."

"Deerforth was his cousin?"

"Yes."

"The name of the other was Hanson Burk."

"Yes."

"And who was the man with him?"

"A stranger to us; we do not know his name. But, a tool of his, and as you no doubt saw, the one who put the papers in his hands."

"And where did the papers come from?"

"Taken from the possession of the murdered man, no doubt, now that we learn that he has been killed."

"Can it be possible?"

"What surprises you?"

"That I did not recognize the fellow. It seems impossible that he could have been in so good a disguise."

"Who did you think it was?"

"I had no idea who it was; I did not recognize the fellow at all."

"I mean, who do you now think it may have been?"

"A deserter from the fort, a fellow who owed Deerforth a grudge and who was suspected of having killed him."

"You are no doubt right, putting all things together. It is possible that Burk himself did the deed, but it now appears that this man was his ally."

"But, why could I not recognize him?"

"That is for you to say."

"And I cannot explain it. It must be that Grat Benson was not the man, after all."

"What are you going to do?"

"Continue my search for the murderer of Captain Deerforth."

"He was a friend of yours?"

"Yes, he was. But, suppose we let it drop. How long shall you remain at the fort?"

"We may stop there some days, if we think there is any chance for our recovering those papers."

"Which you are not likely to do, unaided, now, having let your golden opportunity slip through your fingers."

"For which we have to thank the crowd in the saloon, yourself included, since you have admitted that you were there and saw what took place."

"It was one of the cases that will happen. No one thought they could get out of your hands till they were gone. Your partner here should have used his gun the moment you were hit."

"No use finding excuses, or saying what should have been done. If you get on track of those papers will you restore them to us?"

"Yes."

"Then there remains nothing more to be said."

"One question more, and I'll trouble you no further: In whose interest are you working?"

"Why, in the interest of the lawyers who have the estate in hand, of course, sir."

"And, seeing that Deerforth is dead, will the estate go to Burk, if he can clear himself?"

"If he can clear himself; but, it is not likely that he can."

"The uncle was killed, I think you said."

"Yes."

"And now supposing that Burk is hanged for the crimes, to whom will the estate go in that case?"

"To another cousin, a degree further removed, who will stand next in order. But, that is as far as I know anything about it, and I can't swear that is straight."

"You know his name?"

"I do not."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, then, was this man he? I mean the man who turned over the papers and received the money."

"It was not."

"Then that theory is exploded. If not he, and not Grat Benson, who was it? But, no matter, we'll find out all in good time. If you remain at the fort some days, you may hear from me."

"No doubt we'll remain, for men of our profession can no doubt be of use to the commander of the fort, clearing up the mystery, and his scouts will be of great service to us in hunting our man down again. Well, as you are going, we'll see you later."

CHAPTER XIII.

SAFETY SAM STRIKES A TRAIL.

WHEN the two men, he of the black beard and his companion, left the saloon, they darted straight across the street.

There they passed between two buildings which stood close together but which afforded passage at a pinch, and thus they were immediately lost to sight.

As soon as they had gone through, the man of the black beard gave way to the other, telling him to take the lead, which he himself quite evidently could not do, not knowing the ground.

No time was lost, and the man of the beard and cane followed where the other conducted.

They were soon upon the outskirts of the camp.

Here they presently came to a shed, serving as an apology for a stable, and both entered and secured horses.

As soon as they led the animals forth, they leaped into the saddle, he of the beard still clinging to his cane, and they set forward at a walk in the direction of the trail leading to Silver City.

They did not speak, and no sound was made save that of the hoof-strokes of their horses.

They kept on the outskirts, and did not strike the trail till they had gone some distance from the camp proper, when they increased their speed.

"Well, that was a close call," said he of the beard, then.

"You are right it was," agreed the other.

"But, a miss is as good as a mile, they say, and I have still got the papers in my possession."

"Have you any idea who they were?"

"Yes, I have."

"Who?"

"Certainly not what they claimed to be."

"What I thought. If they had been genuine detectives they would have made sure of us."

"They might have done so, perhaps, but I will not swear to that. My cane was a big factor in the little affair, you noticed."

"But their drop would have been a good deal bigger, if they had been the real thing, for they had it on us in the finest kind of

way. But, no matter, here we are, safe and sound."

"And bound to escape."

"Sure; nothing in the way, now that we are out of the camp."

Then they were silent for a time.

Presently the man of the beard spoke further.

"You will have to guide me to some town where I can take stage or train," he said.

"I'll do that," the response.

"You see, that interruption changed my plans. Only for that I would have remained at Gold Lode for a day or two, or for the time for which I paid for my room, and then would have said good-by to you and gone away as I came."

"I see."

"But, that infernal Hamilton had to chip in— Say, how much will you ask to put him quietly out of the way?"

"The one you tapped with the cane?"

"Exactly."

"Give me another hundred, and— But what's that light ahead?"

"I don't know. It just caught my eye, and I was going to ask you. Seems to be a lantern."

"That's what it must be. Some fellow must be out looking for an honest man, like Diogenes of old. Wonder if he won't take us for such? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! Not likely, if he is any judge."

"Maybe not. But, where has it gone to?"

The light had suddenly disappeared, even while they were looking at it, and all was darkness.

"Well, that's funny. It was too real and too bright to be a jack-o-lantern, and besides this ain't the kind of ground to produce such things, anyhow. It must have been a lamp."

"Or a spook."

"I take no stock in such things."

"Well, no need of our stopping here, anyhow, is there?"

"I should say not."

They had come to a halt, but they now proceeded.

"You say you will attend to it for a hundred?" asked the man of the cane and whiskers.

"Yes."

"And when will you do it?"

"Soon as chance offers, after I have guided you out."

"All right, I'll give you the sum to-morrow, and trust to you to keep your part of the compact."

"Which I'll do, every time."

"With the papers in my possession, and with Deerforth and Hamilton both removed, there is nothing in my way whatever. But, enough of this; there may be ears to take in what we say."

And ears there were.

Safety Sam gave a start as he caught what was said.

On his way to Gold Lode, pushing his bicycle, with its lamp attached and lighted, he had caught the sound of hoofs and voices.

He removed the lamp instantly from its place and put it in his pocket, and then stepped aside with his wheel to let the horse-men pass, for he had no idea it was any one in whom he had interest.

When he caught these words, however, his whole interest was keenly awakened, and he knew that chance had favored him.

He allowed the two men to pass, and turned his wheel about and followed.

It was impossible to ride just here, in the dark, but it was no trouble for him to keep the two horsemen in hearing distance, and in sight, too, where the gulch was open enough to admit the little light there was.

The two men presently resumed their conversation, but Sam was too far behind them to catch what they said.

In half an hour he came to ground where he could ride with safety.

He still kept the lamp in his pocket.

Here he ran up nearer to the two horsemen, his wheel making no sound that was at all likely to draw their attention.

Still he could not overhear anything, but as no discovery followed he thought it safe to maintain that distance, and in this manner they made their way down out of the hills.

Finally Silver City was reached.

Safety Sam had been wondering whether or not the men would stop here.

By their course, he knew immediately that they did not intend to do so, for they turned to skirt the town.

Here he knew every foot of the ground, and could ride his wheel without fear of any mishap, and when the horsemen increased their speed he went rolling after them with ease.

Going around the town, they struck the trail again, and made off in the direction of Freeman.

Safety Sam's mind was busy.

Here, he had every reason to believe, was the murderer of Captain Deerforth.

What he had overheard was evidence enough for that, yet there was something he could not understand.

Who was Hamilton? What were the papers referred to? Who was this man, and what was the scheme in which he was interested? Things he must find out, if at all possible.

Had there been but one man, he would have lost no time in attempting his arrest, but with two to contend against he hardly dared to risk it.

Should they wound him, to say nothing of killing him, they would escape, and perhaps the mystery of the fort would remain a mystery forever.

So he continued on, a silent shadower of the night, keeping the men just visible in the darkness, and mile after mile was laid behind them.

They crossed the river, and had covered about a third of the distance from that point to Freeman, when something took place that created excitement.

Safety Sam heard suddenly a command to halt, given in the true military style, and with ejaculations the two horsemen ahead jerked their horses to a stop.

"What's wanted?" demanded one of the pair.

"Who are you, and where are you going?" was the demand, in a tone of assumed authority.

"That for your answer!" cried the man of the black beard, and raising his cane the report as of a rifle rung out, a heavy bullet speeding close to the head of the man who had attempted the hold-up.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRESTO! CHANGE.

"AND that my rejoinder!" cried the man who had stopped them, firing a shot from his revolver that came as close to the other. "Surrender, or I'll drop you both out of the saddle!"

Safety Sam now recognized the voice.

It was that of Captain Dettlinger, the man against whom suspicion had pointed.

The Cycle Sport saw the opportunity for which he had been hoping, and at once took the step to improve it.

"Yes, up with your hands, murderers!" he cried from the rear. "If you don't, you will be riddled with bullets from every side. Dettlinger, these are the slayers of Deerforth!"

"And you are Safety Sam?"

"Yes."

In this brief moment the other two had exchanged some words, and now suddenly both dashed away.

They had jerked their horses aside from

the trail, in opposite directions, and were off like the wind. Bullets were sent after them instantly, but without effect.

"After the other!" cried Safety Sam. "I'll take care of this one!"

"Right; and make it a race to the death!"

Sam was after the man of the whiskers instantly, and Captain Dettlinger spurred forward to keep the other in sight.

As it happened, the man Sam was after had taken the direction that led to Fort Fenton, while the other went speeding away to the west along the river, where lay a wilderness.

Let us follow Safety Sam.

He soon discovered that the man he was after was mounted upon a good horse, and that he would have to work to keep up with him.

"You had better stop, murderer!" he called out to the pursued. "If you don't I'll be under the painful necessity of lodging a bullet in your skin somewhere, and it may hit you hard."

"Ha! ha! ha!" came back the laugh. "Fire if you want to, and catch me if you can, fool!"

Sam fired, and fired to hit, too.

He could not afford to let this man get away from him, if a bullet would be the means of stopping him.

Not that he wanted to kill him, for he did not; he wanted him alive; but, his bullets missed the mark, and the man almost disappeared in the darkness.

The Cycle Sport dropped his gun into its holster, bent all his muscle to the business of propelling his wheel, and he was soon spinning over the ground at as rapid a pace as he had ever ridden.

Useless to say that his bicycle could outrun the horse; facts and figures prove otherwise.

The speed mile for the bicycle is a very little less than two minutes, as recorded, while that of the horse is a minute and forty seconds.

But, for the long race, the bicycle is the better steed, which Safety Sam knew full well, and his only effort was to keep sight of the man he was pursuing and not lose him.

Gradually, though, the forms of horse and rider grew more dim, and at last they were gone from sight altogether.

But Safety Sam had no thought of giving up.

Ahead of him was the murderer of Captain Deerforth, and it was now or never to capture him.

Pulling hard on the handle-bars, he made every ounce upon the pedals count for all it was worth, and he held to as straight a course as it was possible for him to take.

Low down on the horizon was a star, and it had been in direct line with that star that the rider had disappeared.

On and on, and yet on, sped the Cycle Sport.

He had the hope that he would again sight the man he was in pursuit of, and he knew if he did the horse would not be able to distance him a second time.

The ground seemed to roll away from beneath his spinning wheels, and there was scarce a sound, save his own rapid breathing, and the hiss of the tires as they came in contact with the earth.

On, and still on.

The pursuer kept a careful look-out on both sides as well as ahead. He knew there was the possibility of his passing his foe, if the man stopped.

He did not attempt to use the light, for it would have been of no service, at the speed he was going, and would only serve to reveal his position to the man he wanted to capture.

Thus something like ten minutes was consumed.

Finally, away to the left, was seen a dark object, and Safety Sam turned and sped in that direction.

As silently as a part of the night itself, almost, he bore down upon it, and it took but a moment to prove that the object was moving.

A little nearer, and it resolved into horse and rider, and the Cycle Sport was certain that once more he had gained sight of his man, and he looked upon him as already his prisoner.

The horseman was now going at a much slower gait, as if confident that he had left the sport far behind.

Safety Sam fell in behind, and for some distance did not try to gain.

Then he took a spurt and ran forward.

He was not heard till he was almost upon the horse and rider, and it was the horse that heard him first.

The rider looked around, and an angry oath escaped him.

"Throw up your hands!" cried the Cycle Sport. "If you try to get away from me again I'll tumble you out of that saddle!"

For answer the man leaned forward in the saddle, dug his heels into the animal's flanks, and the horse obeyed the demand with a snort and a sudden leap into a sharp run.

Safety Sam fired three or four shots just as rapidly as he could pull the trigger of the self-cocker.

With a scream the horse reared and became unmanageable.

Sam ran in, making a half circle, and as he came near he again ordered the man to surrender.

"It will signal your death, if you do not," he gave warning. "I mean business, now, and either I take you or you do for me. What do you say?"

The crack of a pistol was the response.

The bullet sped close to Sam's body, and he fired again as quickly as he could.

"Curse you, Safety Sam, we may as well have it out here!" cried the man at bay, throwing himself out of the saddle as his horse went to the ground. "It is your life or mine!"

Safety Sam was amazed.

The voice was not that of the man he had been following.

Another report, and this time the bullet came even nearer to finding lodgment in the sport's body.

Sam now fired a couple of shots, having drawn his other gun, but running as he was he too missed the mark, and his enemy fired yet again, with deliberate aim. Sam felt the bullet graze his back.

This would not do, and he stopped suddenly and threw himself to the ground.

So quickly was it done, that the man who had fired at him was deceived and thought his bullet had done mischief.

"Ha! what did I say?" he cried, and he came running forward, firing another shot as he came.

Sam had not thought of playing such a trick as this, but he took the cue the instant he saw the man's mistake, and as he lay there he released his rifle from its place on the bicycle frame.

Up the fellow came, running, revolver in hand.

Sam's rifle spoke, and the arm that held the revolver fell powerless to the fellow's side, the weapon dropping to the ground.

With a roar of pain the man stopped, grabbing first his wounded arm with the hand of the other, but the next moment reaching for another revolver, determined to kill his foe if possible.

"Stop!" cried Sam, in warning. "I have a bead on you with this rifle, and I can drill you in a wink!"

"Drill and be darn!" was the retort.

It was a couple of leaps or three to the man's side, and Sam was there before he could use his gun and had seized him.

There was not much light, but there was sufficient for the two men to see each other's faces and to his surprise Safety Sam found that he had captured Grat Benson, the deserter!

The man of the black beard, the one who had undoubtedly killed Captain Deerforth, had made good his escape.

CHAPTER XV.

SAFETY SAM'S CLEAR GRIT.

"WELL, kill me," said the prisoner, between his teeth.

"Oh, no," answered Sam. "You and I will take a little journey over to the fort, first."

"And there I'll be shot by a file of soldiers. Have mercy on me and drop me here and put me out of my misery. See what you have done to my arm."

"Your own fault. It would not have happened, if you had surrendered when I told you to. But, it is not likely that you will be shot when you reach the fort, so do not let that trouble you."

"What do you mean?"

"That you will be hanged."

"Hanged?"

"Yes, for the murder of Captain Deerforth."

"Heavens! I have done no murder, Sam Hoffman! I have not been to the fort, man."

"You swear to that?"

"Yes."

"Well, if that is the case you may escape hanging, if you can prove it."

"Then Deerforth has been murdered?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Night before last—the same night you escaped from me."

"And you thought I had gone to the fort and done the deed? Oh, no; I'm not a fool, if I am a villain."

"Then you own to the latter charge?"

"May as well."

The man answered in sullen, snarl-like sentences.

He was nursing his shattered arm, and a moan of pain escaped him occasionally as he did so.

"Well, we'll have to move on to the fort," said Sam.

"I can't walk there, now that you have killed my horse," was the growl.

"You'll have to walk, unless you can ride my bicycle. It was your own fault that the horse got it."

"You had better drop me here and leave me."

"That would be murder. No, I'll bind up that arm, and we'll push on. I am sorry I had to do it, but you would have it."

"I am only sorry that I didn't get a bullet into you first."

"I know you are, but no matter."

Sam had disarmed the man, and now he set about attending to his wound with as much care as he could have taken for a friend.

He had brought his lamp into use, and the rascally Benson was glad enough to sit on the ground and submit to the operation. A wound will tame the worst man in the world.

"By the way," asked Sam, as he worked, "did you see anything of another horseman?"

"Where?"

"In the direction you were going when I overhauled you."

"No."

"Well, there was one, and he was the man I was after."

"Then you had not been shadowing me all the way?"

"All the way from where?"

"No matter."

"No, I came across you by accident. Do you think you can prove that you did not kill Deerforth?"

"I can swear that I did not."

"That will not do. Unless I can capture this other fellow, the crime is likely to be put on you."

"Then he is the man that did it?"

"Yes, he or some one he hired."

"Know his name?"

"I do not."

"What kind of man?"

"Black whiskers, and carries a rifle."

Safety Sam, of course, did not know the rifle was in the form of a cane.

"I seen sech a fellow as that at Freeman, this afternoon, but he left there on the stage. He had a cane, though."

It was easy for the man to drop into the vernacular of such characters as he had lately been associated with, although Grat Benson was a man of no mean education, really.

"And what do you know about him?"

"Not a thing, 'cept that he acted rather queer."

"Well, he had reason to, seeing that he was responsible for a murder, even if he did not do the work himself."

When the Cycle Sport had finished dressing the wounded arm, he rose and helped his prisoner to his feet, and when he had put the bicycle-lamp in its place on the wheel, they set forward.

The night was far advanced when they came to the fort.

"Halt!" they were there greeted. "Who comes there?"

"A friend, without the countersign," answered the sport.

"Who are you, friend?"

"Safety Sam with a prisoner."

"Advance, Safety Sam."

The sport came on, forcing his prisoner along in advance of him, and they were allowed to pass.

Ten minutes later Grat Benson was a prisoner in the guard-house.

Safety Sam did not call the commander, but threw himself down in a convenient place to get some sleep and rest.

He had given orders that he should be called at the first streak of daylight, and had requested a soldier to have something for him to eat at that time, merely a piece that he could take in his hand.

He was called promptly at the time desired.

A sandwich was ready for him, and a cup of coffee, and he made haste with them.

Having done, he mounted his wheel, leaving an explanatory word for the commander, and just as it was growing light he went speeding across the plain in the direction of Freeman.

He could follow his own tracks, and his objective point was the place where he had lost sight of his other shadowed man.

Making speed, he came to the place just about the time the sun rose.

He had taken care not to mistake the tracks made by Grat Benson's horse for those made by the other man's.

But, there was little chance for such mistake.

From the place where he had the fight with Benson, and had captured him, he followed his bicycle trail further.

There was the curve made at the time when he had first sighted Benson, and following that he eventually came to the place where the tracks of the other horse were to be seen.

And then the puzzle was made clear.

In order to drop his pursuer, the man had turned sharply to the left, and Sam had thus missed him.

"That was well done, anyhow," said Sam to himself. "The fellow is no fool, even if he is not acquainted with these plains, and it is clear that he is not or he would not have gone in that direction."

The way the man had taken led to the desert.

It was a plain trail, and the Cycle Sport went spinning along upon it with ease.

Anywhere out of the hills, for miles and miles, it was ideal bicycle country, as we have elsewhere said, and at the present time there are more wheels than one there.

At a steady pace Sam pushed on, a gait that he could have kept up half the day, if need be, till at last the whiter sands ahead told of the desert.

He had long since passed the spot where the horseman had reduced his speed, and now he came to the place where the horse had come to a walk.

Still nothing was in sight, and he pressed on and on, following the track, well knowing that he had only to follow it to its end in order to find his prey, for there was here no way of escape.

At last, afar out on the barren waste, a dark object was visible, and as Sam drew nearer to it he found that it was a horse, and presently another object on the ground resolved into the form of a man lying there. The Cycle Sport had by sheer perseverance run down his game of the previous night.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRYING FOR THE MASTERY.

THE sun was by this time getting high, and the heat there on the border of the desert was oppressive.

The wheeling was good, however, the ground being of that hard, dry nature, peculiar to the region of which we write, and the Cycle Sport pressed steadily on.

When finally he drew near to where the man lay, the horse gave a glad whinny, but the man on the ground did not move, and Safety Sam thought he must be dead, but such was not the case.

Sam saw his mistake as soon as he ran up and dismounted.

The man was sleeping heavily, having tired himself completely out in his aimless ride.

The Cycle Sport detective took away the cane rifle, and a revolver which he saw in a hip-pocket, and having done so, gave the sleeper a prod with his foot.

The man gave a grunt and stretched himself, but it needed another prod to bring him to his senses.

When he opened his eyes he sat up with a start.

"Good-morning," said Sam.

"Where am I—what does this mean?" spoke the man.

"You are right here, sir, and it means that you are my prisoner," was the rejoinder.

The man's hand sought his hip.

"It isn't there," said Sam, provokingly.

"You are safe and harmless, my friend. Suppose we get acquainted."

"Who are you?" was the snarl.

"I am called Safety Sam, the Cycle Sport, and sometimes a detective, out of sarcasm, perhaps."

"And what are you going to do with me?"

"Take you to Fort Fenton, dead or alive."

"For what purpose?"

"That you may be brought to account for the murder of Captain Deerforth."

The man had been pale from the first, but now his face turned to death-like whiteness.

"I have done no murder," he declared.

"Nevertheless, Captain Deerforth has been murdered."

"But, why do you lay the crime to me? You do not know me?"

"Because you are the man who will profit most by his death, you see."

"I fail to understand you, sir."

"I don't see how I can state it any more plainly."

"But, I never heard of any such person. Who and what was this man, Deerforth?"

"He was a captain at Fort Fenton, sir. His uncle recently met his death, and you, with certain papers in your possession, and with Deerforth and Hamilton both removed, will be benefited."

It will be remembered how Safety Sam had gained the information he now made use of.

The man looked at him wildly.

"In the name of Heaven," he ejaculated, "what do you know, anyhow?"

"A few things."

"But, you are mistaken, I swear you are mistaken. I am innocent of all you charge, sir."

"Well, let's see about that. Just show up what papers you happen to have on your person, and explain who and what you are. If you prove up innocent, of course I have no more to say."

"But, by what right do you make this demand?"

"Well, by the right of might, for instance. I have got the drop on you, and you are in my power."

"Then you make the demand of a coward."

"Not exactly that. I make the demand of a detective, just now, for I have been especially commissioned by General Fielding to ferret out this matter. So, now, show down."

"And if I refuse?"

"Well, in that case I think I am man enough to overcome you and search you by force."

"If that is your thought, sir, you may as well begin. I am not going to be bullied into doing a thing, and if you search me you will have to do it by force."

Safety Sam measured his man more closely. What meant this bold defiance, when he had the fellow in his power?

The Cycle Sport thought he understood it, and he made no mistake in his guess in the matter, either.

It was the only chance the man had for escape, and he meant to make the most of it. Sam knew that it would be a hard fight, but he had gone too far to draw back now.

If he refused the challenge, for such it really was, how would he get his man to Fort Fenton.

"Well, get up here and we'll see about it," he said, coolly.

"But, you are armed and I am not," the man argued. "You dare not take me on equal footing."

"Do not imagine that I would take you any other way," said Sam. "Just step out there and I will lay off my weapons, and then we'll see which is the better man in short order."

The prisoner readily complied with the request, and Sam was not unmindful of the look of desperate hope that beamed in his eyes.

The Cycle Sport was full of calm and quiet determination.

He laid aside his revolvers and knife, and stepped forward to meet his foe for the contest.

It was better for him to lay the weapons aside. It was fair to the man he was to contend with, and it insured his own safety against their falling into his hands during the struggle.

"Are you ready?" Sam asked.

"Ready."

They sprung together instantly.

Sam tried to get a certain hold, but missing it he gave his opponent an advantage.

The other was not slow to take it, and from the first, and for some time he had everything almost his own way.

"We'll see which is the better man," the rascal opponent grated. "I'll leave your bones here to whiten in the sun, since you saw fit to follow me."

"Save your breath," said Sam.

It required all the strength the Cycle Sport

could bring to bear to keep from being overcome.

At a disadvantage, as said, he could do nothing more than stubbornly resist, and by resisting he made it necessary for his antagonist to put forth every effort to hold his advantage.

This lasted some minutes.

This way and that they swayed, to and fro, grinding their heels into the ground as they exerted their strength.

Suddenly Safety Sam saw his chance.

With a turn as quick as thought he changed his hold, and the advantage was his.

Another move, and he had gained the hold which he had tried to get at the beginning, and from that moment the battle was his, for he had superior strength, slightly.

Finally his antagonist was on his back on the ground, and the Cycle Sport had his knee on his breast.

"How about it now?" Sam asked.

"Curse you!" was the panted response.

"You may do that if you want to, certainly."

"You'll never take me from this spot alive, I swear it!"

"You make your mistake there, my good fellow. I am master of the situation now, and it will be as I say."

"You'll see."

"And so will you."

Sam brought the man's hands together, and bound them with a strap which he took from his jacket pocket.

That done, he got up and stretched himself.

"I think I'll take my bones back home with me, after all," he said in a light manner. "I did not fancy the idea of leaving them here to whiten, as you suggested. Now, for those papers."

With that, he stooped and examined the prisoner's pockets.

There were some letters and papers in one, and in another was the packet he had received from the man in the Saddle Saloon.

"These are the documents, sir," said Sam.

"These tell the tale. Even if you did not kill Deerforth yourself you know who did, and you are the man responsible for his death. You are in for it."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUEL IN THE DARK.

It was useless for the man to deny further, now.

He changed his manner immediately, and began begging for his liberty, offering to pay well for it.

That, however, with a man like the Cycle Sport, was worse than useless, and finally the prisoner lapsed into sullen silence, refusing to speak when spoken to.

Another thing, Sam had discovered in the struggle with the fellow that the black beard was false, and on removing it he found the man to be entirely innocent of any beard at all.

He was not a bad-looking fellow by any means, but yet there was that about his face and the expression of his eyes that gave him the stamp of villain.

Sam put the papers in his own pocket, and said:

"Now, sir, I'll help you to mount, and we'll be off on our return, and I'll introduce you to General Fielding."

No response, and the man did not offer to move.

"Did you hear what I said?" cried the sport.

Still no reply.

The Cycle Sport took a pin from his jacket and stooped over.

"Get up, confound you!" he cried, "or I will make it mighty interesting for you."

The fellow hesitated a moment, and Sam made use of the pin.

With a howl the man was on his feet quick-

ly enough, and he gave Sam a severe kick that almost disabled the sport.

It was useless for Sam to forbear further, and he did not do so. His fist shot out straight from the shoulder, taking the rascal between the eyes, and he dropped to the ground half senseless.

"Now, you will do as I bid, or I will serve you worse!" cried Sam. "I'll throw you across the saddle and tie you there, if you prefer to ride that way rather than to sit up. I'm going to take you to the fort, if I have to take you there dead, and you may as well make up your mind to it."

The fellow had evidently come to that conclusion, now.

He got up, after a moment, and offered no further resistance when Sam helped him to mount.

"I won't tie you, if you are inclined to behave yourself," the sport said. "If you want to fall off it will be at the risk of your own neck."

While speaking, Sam had unfastened one end of the bridle, which he held in his hand, and now mounting his wheel he spoke to the horse and started.

And in this manner they proceeded, Sam leading and the horse following at a gentle lope.

But, in the mean time, what of Captain Dettlinger and the man he had followed?

A word about the captain's manner of leaving the fort.

While the fact that he had been set at liberty immediately after his arrest by the general, if arrest it had been, had assured him that he was not really believed guilty of the murder, yet he felt the weight of the evidence against him.

He resolved to take leave of the fort immediately, for the purpose of clearing up the mystery, if it lay in his power to do so.

Laying off his proper dress, he assumed a disguise.

With that he made his way to the river, where he took a punt and drifted as far down as the trail between Freeman and Junction.

Needless to follow his every movement, but at the time when he came again to our notice he was on his way to Silver City, from Freeman, with the intention of going on to Gold Lode.

Like Safety Sam, he believed that there the rascal would be found, if anywhere, for there everything in the shape of humanity was congregating, and there, if anywhere, he might hope to hide his identity and crime under some clever disguise until the excitement had died away.

Meeting the horsemen on the trail, he was determined not to let them pass till he learned who they were.

We saw the result.

When Safety Sam started after the one, he gave his attention to the other in the manner shown.

Dettlinger had a fresh horse, while that of the man he was after had come a long distance already, to say nothing of the fact that it had been out nearly all the previous day.

The fugitive immediately put his animal to its best, hoping to run out of sight in the darkness, but that was useless.

Dettlinger was full of determination.

He darted after him, and a race for life was commenced, the one eager to get away and the other determined upon capture.

For nearly an hour they held their positions, and then Dettlinger began to gain upon his foe, seeing which, the fugitive turned and opened fire with his revolver at man and horse.

Dettlinger returned the compliment, and the bullets of each came unpleasantly near.

Finally the saddle of the fugitive horse was empty.

The moment he noticed this, and he believed that was immediately, Dettlinger stopped.

At the same time he shouted to the other horse, and that, too, reduced its speed to a trot, and finally stopped, glad enough to do so.

Dettlinger looked and listened, hoping to see or hear something that could give him the clue to the whereabouts of his foe, and while he stood thus, just for a moment, he was fired at.

Then came the report of a revolver, close at hand, and the bullet struck its object.

Dettlinger felt a twinge in his arm and a dull pain in his side the instant he caught the flash and heard the report, and the next he knew was reeling out of the saddle.

He fell upon his head and shoulder, but was not further hurt, and no sooner was he on the ground than he heard an exulting cry and saw a man rushing toward him.

He drew himself together instantly, as well as he could.

Fortunately the bullet had not broken his arm.

As the man was about to throw himself upon him, the captain fired, but his shot missed.

"Curse you! didn't I finish you?" cried his foe, leaping upon him. "I'll do it now, for this bullet you have lodged in my shoulder, curse you!"

Dettlinger met the attack as well as he could, and the two wounded men grappled with each other in a deadly struggle, each armed, but each trying to prevent the other from using a weapon.

It was a fight worse than that which followed between the Cycle Sport and his foe, for here it was deadly.

Both men were wounded, both were bleeding, and each was determined.

One hand of each held a weapon, but that hand was confined in the other's grasp, and thus they struggled.

The captain knew if he was overcome his life would pay the forfeit, while the villain knew fully as well if he lost the fight he would be brought to answer for his crime.

How long they struggled Dettlinger could never tell, but it seemed an age.

His wound grew painful, his blood mingled with that of his foe, and both men were wet with the life fluid and both were growing weaker.

Finally the captain realized that he could hold out no longer, for his head grew light and it was all he could do to keep his senses, and he thought that his end had come.

After all his brave effort, to die thus miserably—it was awful!

But, just when he felt his senses going, and felt his hold giving way, he realized that his foe had become lifeless in his grasp.

How long he was insensible the captain had no means of knowing, but he came to and found himself lying across the body of his enemy, who was still unconscious—or dead for all he knew.

Exerting all his strength, he bound the fellow's hands, and that was the last he knew till the sun was beating upon his face.

When he opened his eyes he found his enemy struggling to free his hands, and he had nearly succeeded, too, but Dettlinger promptly made them fast again, his own strength having to a degree returned.

Both horses were standing not a great distance away, more friendly to each other than their masters, and Dettlinger had little trouble in capturing them, after which he went to the river and bathed the blood from his hands and face and took a long drink.

Much refreshed, he returned, carrying some water in his hat to his prisoner, and when he had drank and bathed his head he was assisted to mount.

It was some hours later when, by chance, Dettlinger and Safety Sam met with their prisoners.

From that point they continued on toward the fort together.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REVELATION AND CONCLUSION.

RETURN we to Fort Fenton.

The old fort lay grim and forbidding in the morning sunlight.

But, then, that was in appearance only, and that appearance had different aspects, according to the character of the beholder.

To the oppressed, seeking a refuge, or to the honest man who could come there openly, there was withal a friendliness about the dull and frowning old place that was agreeable.

To the outlaw, the grim and forbidding appearance was intensified.

On the top of the house of the commander, as on a former occasion, were General Fielding, and the short, plump widow, Mrs. Masters.

The general had been scanning the horizon with his glass, and his face was stern, having about it something of the grimness of the old fort itself. It took a degree of courage for the widow to lay her fingers on his sleeve.

"My dear general," she said, "it pains me to see you look so troubled. I wish it were in my power to take some of the weight off your heart and mind, but what can I do? This trouble that has come upon your peaceful life here— Ah! me; only a wife could help you bear it."

"It isn't the trouble, Mrs. Masters, it's them scouts," was the brusque and ungrammatical response. "Some of them ought to be turning up by this time."

He viewed the horizon again.

The woman gave a shiver, as the grammatical error made her flesh creep, but she choked down the correction that sprang to her lips.

So used was she to training the speech of her daughter, that she came almost to correcting the general, and only caught herself just in time. That would have been something terrible, as she said to herself.

"Yes, but you have trouble, dear general," laying her fingers just a little more heavily upon his arm, "and, as far as I am able, I want to be of use to you in helping you to bear it. I feel that I am in some measure responsible for it, for if we had not come here—"

"Tut, tut. Not a word of that. But, here is your daughter, and if you will excuse me for a few minutes I must go down and give some orders."

He lifted his hat and was gone at once.

Mrs. Masters watched him until he had disappeared, then turned to her daughter.

"Kate, I have been wanting to see you alone," she said. "What is the matter between you and dear Mr. Longman? It cannot be possible you will let slip such an opportunity."

"It's gone, mamma, dear," was the smiling confession.

"What?"

"I say it's clean gone. I have seen all I want of dear Mr. Longman, as you call him."

"What is the trouble? Are you crazy?"

"Not a bit of it. Why, he is the greatest coward on earth!"

"What does that matter, so long as he is rich? I tell you you shall marry him!"

"No, thank you, mamma," still smilingly. "If you marry the general, that will be sufficient for the present, won't it? I have my cap set for a dashing lieutenant, don't you know?"

"If I marry the general— What on earth are you talking about? You surely must be crazy, now."

"Not a bit of it. Ta-ta, mamma; see you later."

And with that the young woman turned to the steps, to go down to the yard where the other young women were calling her.

"Well, well, who would have thought that she could read my heart," the plump

widow asked herself. "I am sure I took all pains to hide it, and yet it is the truth—I love him!"

When the general returned to the roof for another look around over the plains, he found the plump widow blushing to the tips of her ears.

"Why, what's the matter, Mrs. Masters?" he demanded.

"N—nothing," she answered. "Only—only I am sure I did not mean to let it be known."

"Known? Let what be known? What are you talking about, my dear woman? I see by your face that something has happened. Something your daughter has been confessing to you?"

"Confessing?"

"Yes. I have a notion that she and Russel—"

"Oh! general! Then that was her secret, and that is the reason she is throwing away Longman—"

"Pish! that fellow isn't worth her little finger. If that's all, my dear woman, don't let it trouble you, for Russel is a good fellow and not by any means penniless."

"But, that's not all, dear general; she did not tell me anything about that at all, in fact. What she said was, that—that I was—was in love with you, and that anybody could see it. I am sure I did not mean to let it be known, General Fielding, and—"

"There, there, do not let that trouble you, my good woman; I meant to speak to you in that line myself. We'll call in the chaplain, as soon as I get a little time to spare."

"Oh! general!"

She was upon her feet, her hands clasped, and when he opened his arms to her she leaped within his embrace and there she melted—so to say.

But, the old war dog quickly put love and sentiment aside, for the time being, and looked out across the plains again, in all directions, and this time he caught sight of something.

"It's him!" he exclaimed. "It's my scout on wheels returning, and three men on horseback are with him!"

"Let me look, please, James dear."

"Certainly."

"Yes, it's he," the widow cried, instantly, with some stress on the pronoun. She had begun her training in language.

There was excitement when Safety Sam and Captain Dettlinger rode into the fort with their prisoners.

And there was more when they told their stories, handing over their prisoners as the men who were responsible for the death of Captain Deerforth.

It required the strong hand and iron will of General Fielding to keep his men in order, for, soldiers though they were, the prisoners would have fared badly if they could have had their way.

They were locked up, under guard, and the wounded one was attended to.

About the time they had been disposed of, two men reached the fort from the direction of Silver City.

They were the two whose acquaintance we have partly made, the pair who laid claim to being detectives, and who had the conversation with the mysterious stranger at Gold Lode.

They asked to see the commander.

General Fielding was soon on hand, and inquired their mission.

"We are detectives," the spokesman explained, "and have come here to aid in hunting down the murderer of Captain Deerforth."

"The deuce you say! Who are you—that is, your names, and where do you come from? In what way are you concerned in the matter? Not likely that it is out of professional kindness."

"We have come here, because we know who did the deed, and because we want the aid of your soldiers in running him down and bringing him to account. We can be helpful to each other, General Fielding. My name is Wilson Parker, and that of my partner is Jones."

"You say you know who killed Deerforth?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"His cousin, Hanson Burk, going under the name of Howard Burkson."

"For what reason did he kill him? Since you know this much, perhaps you can tell us that."

"For the same reason that he killed his uncle, that he might come into his wealth. With the uncle and Deerforth both removed, he would be the next heir to the estate."

"That's the way of it, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are looking it up out of general motives?"

"Oh, no; we are in the employ of the lawyers who have the settling of the estate. We are paid for our work."

"And your name is Wilson Parker, eh?"

"So I said, sir."

"I know you said so, but, that does not make it so. Are you sure your name is not Watson Hamilton?"

The fellow turned as pale as death, and looked about as if for some means of escape, while he sought for an answer to the question, which was not readily found.

"Well, you need not answer," said the commander. "I have the whole story from a scout, who came here from Gold Lode at an early hour this morning, after his talk with you fellows last night."

"There is a mistake—"

"Yes, and you are the man who has made it," spoke now another voice, and forward stepped a man who had come with the scout from Gold Lode. "It is too bad that we were too late to save the life of Deerforth, commander."

"Yes, it is too bad, Lawyer Hazelton," responded General Fielding. "But, you are in time to remove suspicion from the innocent and put the crime where it belongs. Men, put these two under arrest."

The soldier had the men in charge in a moment.

The other prisoners were then ordered out, and all were brought face to face, so that the truth could be arrived at.

Burk and Hamilton fell to accusing each other immediately, and it required no further evidence to fasten the guilt upon them—the more particularly upon Burk. He was the one who had killed the uncle, but Hamilton knew about it.

The latter was willing to let it go on till Deerforth had been put out of the way, when he intended to expose Burk, have him hanged, and so come into the property himself as the next of kin. But, it had not worked that way, and both would have to suffer for the crimes.

Grat Benson was innocent of the murder.

He declared that he would not have trusted himself inside the fences of Fort Fenton for all the gold in the Rockies.

He confessed that he had come down for the purpose of stealing Fanny Fielding, and carrying her off to make her his wife, and he had brought a band of cut-throats to aid him.

Their scheme was to get the soldiers out from the fort, and then steal in and in some manner accomplish the object.

Benson met the fate he deserved.

The man who had killed Deerforth was the companion of the fellow Burk.

He had made his way through the guard-line, and entered the fort at the time when Dettlinger returned with his men and prisoners on that night.

He accomplished his object, and made his

escape by way of the river, going out at a time when the guard was changing, unobserved.

He was dealt with in a most summary manner.

The other rascals were turned over to the civil authorities, and needless to say they suffered the penalty to the full.

Safety Sam, the Cycle Sport, remained at the fort until the excitement had nearly abated.

There was an attraction there for him, we will admit, though he had little hope that the desire of his heart could ever be realized.

Sam Hoffman soon after drifted away from Silver City, where he had disposed of his interests, and the last heard of him he was making a tour on his wheel, still known as Safety Sam, the Cycle Sport. He had friends many, and was a man to make many more, wherever he went.

THE END.

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- 111 The Sea-Devil; or, The Midshipman's Legacy.
- 102 Dick Dead-Eye, the Smuggler; or, The Cruise of the Vixen.
- 75 The Boy Duellist; or, The Cruise of the Sea-Wolf.
- 62 The Shadow Ship; or, The Rival Lieutenants.
- 24 Diamond Dirk; or, The Mystery of the Yellowstone.
- 17 Ralph Roy, the Boy Buccaneer; or, The Fugitive Yacht.
- 7 The Flying Yankee; or, The Ocean Outcast.

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